

COLLECTIVE HEALING WITHIN QUEER PARADOXES:  
*DECONSTRUCTING EMOTIONAL ABUSE IN LGBTQ2SIA\* COMMUNITIES TO  
CULTIVATE MORE ACCOUNTABLE AND COMPASSIONATE WORLDS*

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## ABSTRACT

### COLLECTIVE HEALING WITHIN QUEER PARADOXES: DECONSTRUCTING EMOTIONAL ABUSE IN LGBTQ2SIA\* COMMUNITIES TO CULTIVATE MORE ACCOUNTABLE AND COMPASSIONATE WORLDS

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Emotional abuses within LGBTQ2SIA\* communities are rarely acknowledged as existing or often normalized. Through care and anti-oppression works, transformative justice models such as community and self-accountability have helped carve out ways of addressing harm directly and breaking cycles of violence. The research in this thesis has been through mixed qualitative methodologies including semi-structured interviews and surveys. The participants' along with other authors, artists, activists and scholars' narratives draws upon the experiences of emotional abuse lived within structural and social surveillance. The settler colonial state sanctioned projects have responded to harm by perpetuating violence upon those most marginalized. Deconstructing emotional abuse demands the abolishment of such structures and a recentering of self and community accountability processes within transformative justice utilizing concepts of critically queering to frame care and anti-oppression work. While this research paper addresses how emotional abuses in LGBTQ2SIA\* communities are lived and can be addressed, the reader is also given information on how this research can be made more accessible and transformed into what participants have shared for future and current care work.

## DEDICATION

To you, for us to bloom more fiercely compassionate than the days before.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## INTRODUCTION

This research moves through how folx characterize, and have been involved in, individual and collective response to emotional abuse in LGBTQ2SIA\* communities. My hope is to describe the ways in which structures of patriarchy, heteronormativity, traditional monogamy, and the gender binary have shaped emotional abuse tactics. Complexities to the ways in which we fail to recognize emotional abuse in LGBTQ2SIA\* communities will be highlighted. The research helps to uplift community accountability tactics that address forms of harm. Building upon these frameworks, this thesis addresses how critically queering love can be a platform for anti-oppression work.

*How does emotional abuse appear in LGBTQ2SIA\* relationships and communities? In what ways has emotional abuse in LGBTQ2SIA\* communities been made invisible?*

*How has patriarchy, the gender binary, traditional monogamy, and hetero-centricism shaped tools of emotional abuse? And in what ways have these tools been used as parts of the settler colonial projects?*

*How have individuals and communities created community accountability tactics for emotional abuse? In what ways can queering love be a platform for anti-oppression work?*



Addressing emotional abuse, as with many forms of violence, has been far from easy, especially for LGBTQ2SIA\* folx. The ways in which emotional abuse tactics are utilized can be traced through settler colonial tools that are rooted in systems of power through social and state normalizations of gender binary, heterocentrism, and monogamy. Through these normalized systems of existence misogyny, transphobia, homophobia, and exertion of control over intimate partners have been unitized and often made invisible or acceptable in queer relationships. The state's mechanisms for addressing emotional abuse rely on modes of control, sometimes carried forward by the nonprofit industrial complex (The CR10 Publications Collective 2008). This has not only left out many LGBTQ2SIA\* identities experiencing abuse but capitalized off of those experiences and increased criminalization of folx who have been systematically marginalized in order to uphold narratives of white saviorism and fragility (Flaherty 2006). The ways in which real accountability and justice are found is through individual and collective transformation of ourselves critically in tender, accountable processes. I suggest, by building upon other works, that critically queering love might aid in the epistemologies of anti-oppression works. The ways in which LGBTQ2SIA\* folx and communities are existing, and loving can be a platform to defy systems of settler colonialism. Through a multitude of other writers and activists' thoughts and frameworks, the interviews conducted in this research have attempted to highlight and address emotional abuse in LGBTQ2SIA\* communities along with community accountability tactics that have been exercised. Working through modes of intersectionality to which the multiplicities, where race, class, gender, disabilities, and citizenship are within paradoxes, critically queering asks us to reflect on

those intersections, recognize the internalized systemic violence showing up within us, and grasp at the magic that is alive and continues to be formed in queer worlds.

## HOW I'VE COME TO DREAM

*Written by a cynical bitch queer that hates the institution but loves the plants that grow in its cracks-perhaps we can have a garden where the cement has crumbled and soil is still found amidst its grey walls, reaching for the tenderness of what the past has composted for us.*

We live in a world that feeds on disposability and emotional abuse. None of us are free from its effects. Gaslighting is constantly around us, exertion of control is rarely not present. Emotional abuse is made comical and often overlooked as unimportant, especially in LGBTQ2SIA\* communities. Frameworks that have developed responses to abuse are riddled with the cisheteropatriarchy. Structurally, and socially our stories do not count, or they have not been made central. Accountability has been framed through possibilities of disposability. This can look like people becoming disposable through incarceration or it can look like folx being isolated completely by fellow community members. I'm not here to say that the latter is not valid-I am here to say that if we continue to address violence by disposing or isolating folx, we will not see the cycle of abuse broken.

.....

I name this part of the research *How I've Come to Dream* because of how theoretical frameworks have become alive in my life are so closely related to how dreaming feels. Dreaming is play, dreaming is confusing, dreaming is joyous, dreaming is painful, dreaming is depth, dreaming is expansive and changing, dreaming can help us to understand our waking life. Thus far, the theoretical framework of this thesis has been

one of the most vulnerable parts of its narrative. I've had to restructure, rewrite, remove, reorganize, reimagine every part and I am still in conflict with the way the world of words move. Where its beginnings are and where it falls present are unbenounced to me. I will always be inundated with my attempts at transparency, feelings, and locations of magic. Magic, defined in my own understanding, as the unexplainable happenings around us that can evoke feelings of wonder. I try to be open to you about my own vulnerabilities, learning processes, and moments of transformation that occur within cellular and cosmic relations. Often I will refer to the thesis or research as its own...a creature of its own making and collective personhood. I try to cultivate *being* into research because there has often been a divide between the realm of institutionalized academics and the ways that we live it. This said, although my theoretical framework has been exposed through academics- theory and praxis are inseparable. The ways in which theories have lived within the praxis of my life, my relationships, and my activism have molded the ways in which I think and feel through research. Before frolicking along on my tumultuous thought journey- I want to honor and recognize that the space that I am now in as an activist and being has been through the resilience, labor, and imaginations of Indigenous, Black, and Brown, many queer, trans, and two spirited folx who have thus carved out more spaces and ways we can address harm in all communities while centralizing liberations for those most marginalized by settler colonialism. When asked to write about what theories have influenced my research I was asked what they are and how they came to be. While all of the theories that have influenced and been used in my

research are an inseparable tangled web, I'll try to go through notions of how each has developed in my life.

### The Art of Making Delicious: Erotic, Pleasure, and Joy

*No text is without space for growth. As writers we try to gather what we can and build again the next. We work with the tools we are given. And even in the moments of celebration, of liberation for one struggle, we must be working towards others, as Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2020) said "The edge of one struggle is a connection to the next."*

It is impossible to move through my writing without acknowledging its foundations in the messy worlds and imagery of creators, artists, and poets that have made possible the connections I have to feeling in a way that feels beyond myself and so intimately with words/worlds. Octavia Butler's intricate imaginations of worlds and of course from that the collections of stories within *Octavia's Brood*(2015), a transformative collection of stories blending the realities of fiction and nonfiction-ask us to unwrap how they could possibly be separate. The fabrics of every cosmos opening up to what kind of magic we could wield to create more tender worlds. Last year adrienne maree brown's book release of *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good* allowed for alignment and conversation with Audre Lorde's use of erotic. brown explains "through her writing here and in other places-Lorde was prolific-I became attuned to the ways erotic and other pleasures shaped and healed me. It helped me to understand that there is no way to repress pleasure and expect liberation, satisfaction, or joy" (2019: 22). I remember the first time I read Lorde's *Uses of the Erotic: Erotic as Power*- reading and rereading- feeling and refeeling the seemingly soft touches of how writing, even in the folds of academia, can be miraculously tender. "I find the erotic such a kernel within myself.

When released from its intense and constrained pellet, it flows through and colors my life with a kind of energy that heightens and sensitizes and strengthens all my experience” (Lorde 2000: 185). I mulled over my own kernel for so long, seeing what sweet and savory flavors might bask upon my tongue. Lorde offered a way of connecting to feeling and writing through intimate imagery and sensory thought process. These narratives of pleasure and erotic were formed by queer Black folx who developed such frameworks to uplift queer Black narratives while also paving modes of empowerment that could be utilized by comrades and solidarity movements who recognize and honor these foundations.

Within the same context of reframing and addressing what lives within us, *Joyful Militancy: Building Thriving Resistance in Toxic Times* Montgomery and bergman (2017) have developed another framework known as joyful militancy. Joyful militancy is explained as a process of continual questioning in the ways we interact with worlds, a disruption of the binary between optimistic and pessimistic, along with using affinities to strengthen emergent relationships.

Joy is a desubjectifying process, an unfixing, an intensification of life itself. It is a process of coming alive and coming apart. Whereas happiness is used as a numbing anesthetic that induces dependence, joy is the growth of people's capacity to do and feel new things, in ways that can break this dependence period. It is aesthetic and its older meaning before thinking and feeling were separate; the increase in our capacity to perceive with our senses. (Montgomery and bergman 2018: 60)

While joy encompasses the feeling of feeling, joyful militancy encompasses the fight for feeling. In a world that continuously demands us to be numb Lorde’s erotic, brown’s

reinterpretation of pleasure, Montgomery and bergman's formulation of joyful militancy all grasp at a desire to critically feel and hold ourselves and each other more tenderly.

There was a meme of some sort floating around the interweb at the beginning of COVID-19 quarantine that went something along the lines of "Remember who we looked to in these times. It was the writers, the artists, the creators." I think of those words often now as I attempt to collect the ways I can imagine, and dream of what community can be in a time of crisis. In the context of this research, gathering tools from writers, artists, and creators help to guide us in directions that exercise transformative justice in new, old, and future ways where feeling is central.

#### Theory and Praxis Alive: A Time Boat

*"While we often put our attention on the state and demand transformative and restorative justice it is important that individuals begin practicing in our personal, familial, and communal lives-we can reach the people we need to reach and measure our work by the way relationships feel." - adrienne maree brown (2017)*

It has been difficult for me to trace where my frameworks have originated. In the past five years of my academic life, I've come to know theory and praxis with increased complexities. I, praxis, and theory have a relationship that is polyamorous-we love and understand each other as changing beings while understanding each cannot fully support each other's every need...a community of language and practice coexists with us helping to uplift a framework that is critically queer and sustainable. Theory as a framework that drives our modes of thought and existence. Praxis as in how those frameworks are lived. I realized how beautiful the blending of theory, praxis and pure feeling could be. bell hooks (1991) *Theory as Practice* molded an introduction and resonance for me into how

to move through trauma within theory. hooks describe- “Living in childhood without a sense of home, I found my sanctuary in ‘theorizing’, in making sense out of what was happening. I found a place where I could imagine possible futures, a place where life could be lived differently. This ‘lived’ experience of critical thinking, of re-away. Fundamentally, I learned that theory could be a healing place” (hooks 1991:37). In the ways that hooks, and Lorde framed how theory and learning is so much held in praxis and potential blooming dreams aided in my abilities to reimagine addressing harm and healing trauma.

The relationship between theory and practice is a complex narrative filled with gaps of location, memory, projections, consciousness, and so on. Theory is the accumulation of lived experiences and reality, inquiring, so as to make sense of practices. Theory allows us to critically think about motives and values within our intimate, curricular, and activist lives (rarely do these exist separately). Within *Not by Degrees: Feminist Theory and Education* Charlotte Bunch (1997) describes theory as a non-stagnant entity of critical thought, a fluid building block understanding the way systems have come to be, will come to be, and are. Therefore, defining complexity of how theory is ever shifting- and that although one theory may be engaged with a specific moment in time that it is also going to be morphed because time does not stand still while language and needs are molding to what challenges and experiences arise. Hooks (1991) explains that theory has provided a means of sense-making within the foundations of pain. Meaning that when painful experiences occur theory allows a space for critical thought



processes in understanding why they are happening and again, allowing for healing to take place.

My own foundation of theory can be a place of healing originated with this research.

Through hooks, Bunch, and other works later unfolded, I am able to write and live through theory as a space of intimacy and knowing, where we might find accountability and justice and healing and compassion through the ways we each theorize individually and collectively. hooks (1991) explains that theory is necessary for motivation to heal and create alignments from a location of pain and struggle. This demands the fact that theory and practice are aligned in a way so inevitably submerged within each other one does not influence the other without influencing itself. hooks call for theory as a means to practicing self-recovery and collective healing within experiences of trauma. Theory must be acknowledged as not a one-time substance within particular spaces and times but within every interaction that we have with one another, it allows for a consciousness of compassion and critical thought. I think of this as a relationship to how accountability is practiced. That the space of holding each other and ourselves accountable to harm- or just being more present beings with one another- is an active and continuously transformative process.

This does not mean that theory is a totalizing mindset for deconstructing oppression, theory can also enforce and reinforce harmful narratives within forms of hegemony. Harm can be perpetuated through utilizing or making invisible histories of colonization and intersecting oppressions. hooks and Bunch, along with countless writers, artists, and activists address how ‘popular’ social justice movements often leave out

struggles of intersecting identity. An example today would-be popular feminist movement toward reproductive health being central to cis white woman rather than being inclusive of all identities and bodies able to reproduce. This is an example of how theories of “equality” are utilized to perpetuate harm upon already marginalized communities and identities. Later in this thesis I discuss in more depth Indigenous scholars and activists’ frameworks deconstructing and building upon early feminist theories. When theories are developed by taking into account the anticolonial histories and intersecting struggles they can hold spaces of transformation and healing. An engagement with where and how theory is located helps us to carve out a more encompassing relationship with what reimagination can feel like as it reverberates. As hooks amplifies “...we must continually claim theory as a necessary practice within a holistic framework of liberatory activism” (1991:51).

Theory is ambivalent in many ways, meaning that it encompasses a multitude of sometimes contradicting understandings. I sometimes think of theory and praxis as a way of expanding our ability to feel. Through praxis and theory, we can learn to understand compassion, empathy, and trauma, allowing us to be in the worlds around us in a better way. Theory and praxis can also be isolating in a few ways. First, is that if we are to hold on to a theory and praxis that represent only one mode of existing and do not allow for multiple epistemologies it limits our abilities to connect and feel those other intersecting realities. Second, theory and praxis can be a beautiful way of expanding our senses and understanding of each other, along with, sometimes a sense of aloneness when the people around us are not also putting in the work to understand experiences outside of their own.

While theory and praxis spark moments of joy it can also invoke a grieving process that transforms and reorients us, while allowing us to breathe in more life. Perhaps joy and grieving can be existing on the same cosmic plane, allowing us to feel loss in a way that sits in the joy of having that space to process.

### Weaving Intersectional Feminist Theories and Identity Politics

*“True vulnerability requires risk.” - Mia Mingus (2020)*

While grief and joy riddle the dreams of theory, another central framework that has expanded and motivated more ways that my own and collective dreams in this research have been able to come to fruition is through intersectionality. My first engagement with the term was in Kimberlé Crenshaws’ (1991) work in “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color “. While the work of deconstructing power relations had been in existence- utilizing the power of institutionalized recognition was a huge shift in what kinds of conversations and frameworks were used in academic spaces. Intersectionality was birthed through critical race theorists and will always have been and be a critical mode for anti-oppression, justice works, and liberation. In her work Crenshaw (1991) centralized women of color by highlighting structural and political intersectionality in order to weave their realities through the academic world. While structural intersectionality focuses on the institutionalized violence’s against women of color, for example showing up through the racially discriminatory practices at shelters and other services, political intersectionality shows up in the ways that domestic violence and antiracist movements have been mobilized to make invisible violence against women of color in fear of perpetuating

racist stereotypes (Crenshaw 1991) Collins and Bilge have since developed an excellent interpretation of intersectionality through gathering the core ideas of intersectional frameworks as inequality, relationality, power, social context, complexity, and social justice (Collins, Bilge 2016: 25) These core ideas analyze how power is used through intersections and across other domains of power.

In this research I am analyzing the ways that power is utilized to control and harm. Within these domains of power there are two tools in which intersectionality shows up, critical praxis and critical inquiry. While *critical praxis* is described as “...ways in which people, either as individuals or as part of groups, produce, draw upon, or use intersectional frameworks in their daily lives-as everyday citizens with jobs and families, as well as the institutional actors within public schools, colleges and universities, religious organizations, and similar venues” (Collins, Bilge 2016: 32). Intersectionality as *critical inquiry* suggests it “...invokes a broad sense of using intersectional frameworks to study a range of social phenomena” (Collins, Bilge 2016: 33). Both of these understandings of intersectionality help to expand how they synergistically exist within one another. While many narratives, especially within scholarly fields attempt to compartmentalize the implications of intersectionality, the practice can be seen in all levels of the social and institutional dominatrix. In other words, the ways that intersectionality is lived does not stay in theory, it is lived through praxis as well. Collins and Bilge (2016) delved into the reality that identity and domains of power relations are not something new. Various understandings of intersectionality show us that it is not so much a linear layering or intersections of realities but an eb and flow of theory and

practice which calls into question systems of power that are within and around ourselves and worlds.

Recognizing systems of power and how power shows up within us helps to shape and understand how identity politics and positionality are both weaved within this research entirety. Identity politics asks me to unfold how I come to recognize myself and how I orbit. Deconstructing positionality asks me to expose layers along with the bits of uncomfortability. Stuart Hall within his essay “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” brings about the idea of identity as an imaginative rediscovery of culture. The modern definition summarizes identity as an essence of someone's being within the origins of their past either currently known or rediscovered as their “true” authentic natural self. Hall challenges this definition by saying that identity is “Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to continuous play of history, culture, and power” (Hall 1990: 225). This meaning that our identity is infinitely more complex than to simply immortalize it into one stagnant relationship is to make invisible the dynamic reality of intersecting and morphing hybridity that affects language, location, culture and people’s positionality within them. In Dean Spades book *Normal Life* “Rethinking Transphobia and Power Beyond a Rights Framework” Spade discusses Michel Foucault’s articulation of the productive workings of power within down methods of simplicity in regard to power and its relation to subject categories and stagnant identity (2011: 54). Foucault argues that power is much more complex than binary explanations and that using disciplinary modes of power, which centers norms of good behavior and bad behavior, policing ways of being. This policing is enforced by interaction between each

other and our environment which is normalized by monitoring externally *and* internally. How these modes of power show up within us is essential to this research. LGBTQ2SIA\* communities face violence from the state constantly and there are various conversations that address how violence is perpetrated on to us from the cisheteropatriarchy. That said, we need to also work from a place of recognizing how the cisheteropatriarchy shows up within us and our communities. There are a multitude of ways in which the state can be encompassing and defined. In this paper I will sometimes be referring to the Empire, defined in Joyful Militancy as:

...the organized catastrophe in which we live today. It is not really an 'it' but a tangle of habits, tendencies, and apparatuses that sustain exploitation and control. We argue that it entrenches and accumulates sadness: it crushes, and co-ops forces of transformation and detaches people from their own powers and capacities. It keeps us passive, stuck in forms of life in which everything is done to us or for us. This takes place through overt violence and repression, the entrenchment of hierarchical divisions like heteropatriarchy and racism, by inducing dependence on institutions and markets and by effective control and subjection. (Montgomery, berman 2017: 280-281)

Being able to understand and move through folx active definitions and naming of state violence and existence help us in the process of undoing the Empire. In order to understand how internal, and external relationships with cisheteropatriarchy are, it is imperative to centralize an anticolonial framework and understand how settler colonialism is at the roots of cisheteropatriarchy.

### Indigenous Frameworks

How can we reimagine our dreams outside of the confines of settler colonial imagery? Colonialism has etched its way even into our abilities to dream of new/old worlds. Anticolonialism frameworks expand our abilities to imagine. It's difficult to find

the “right” space/place to explain how anti-colonial frameworks have been weaved into my research because I find these to be the roots of most movements and frameworks of anti-oppression. I’ve come to understand anticolonial frameworks as an active engagement with recognizing the Indigenous territories we reside (often on stolen land), the histories that are found in places that centralize Indigenous experiences, and a working understanding of how colonialism is at the root of state violence and the many modes of harm that are experienced on interpersonal levels. Misogyny, transphobia, homophobia, normalized control and abuse in monogamous relationships are all rooted in colonialism. To unpack emotional abuse in LGBTQ2SIA\* communities is to also unpack a colonial project...both of which are living and thriving through institutionalized support.

The literature that first built my understanding of structural settler colonialism was *A People's History of the United States* (Zinn 1990), *American holocaust: Columbus and the Conquest of the New World* (Stannard 1992), *Documents of United States Indian policy* (Prucha 2000), and the facilitated lectures from professors Marlon Sherman and Joseph Giovenetti at Humboldt State University. Structural settler colonialism can be defined as how settler colonists’ ideologies have built the current governmental and institutional structures that were made for continuing the war upon Indigenous peoples. People, often of white liberal descent, describe the system as being broken. This is reliant on the myth that the system has been built “by and for the people”.

In a critical book to my understanding of how whiteness has co-opted and romanticized Indigenous struggle *Going native: Indians in the American cultural imagination*, Shari Huhndorf explains that “By identifying European America as the

victim of colonial domination, it reinforces the illusion of the nation's historical innocence....European Americans have always been obsessed with stories of the nation's Origins, repeatedly retelling the refrigeration of collective past in self-justifying ways” (Huhndorf 2001:11). In these ways the methods of how current state involvements have been monopolized to justify increased incarceration and violence against Indigenous, Black, Brown, and queer communities. Anticolonialism is an essential framework to work through because although the research focuses on interpersonal emotional abuse the ways that emotional abuse is structurally supported and enforced is through the ideologies and methods of colonialism.

Anti-colonialism allows us to work from a place that is moving against colonial ideology and within narratives of existing that are centered in accountability and care. In an excellent essay called *Decolonizing Feminism: Challenging Connections between Settler Colonialism and Heteropatriarchy* the authors focus on how to challenge systemic violence's and center anti-settler colonialism through Native feminist's work (Arvin, Tick, Morrill 2013). Many folx that are working against systemic violence, such as the heteropatriarchy, leave out the essential context of settler colonialism. Too often we have witnessed in theoretical frameworks and movements the attempt to make invisible some harm while addressing others. In the example of how feminist movements have monopolized on structural colonialism. As Arvin, Tick, and Morrill's article discuss; “We argue that allying oneself with feminism should not require contesting to inclusion within a larger agenda of whiteness; indeed, we believe that Native Feminist theories demonstrate that feminisms, allied with other key causes, hold a unique potential to



decolonize the ascendancy of whiteness in many global contexts” (2013 :10-11). In this sense moving through conversations that address gender and queer violence needs to be conscious of the historical contexts of colonial tactics. Heteronormativity and patriarchy have been tools of colonization that have had a reverberating effect on the ways in which Indigenous peoples experience heteropatriarchal violence (Arvin, Tick, Morrill 2013: 27). Anti-colonialism and anti-oppression movements then ask us to recognize the ways that structural and systemic violence is tied to colonialism. And in the fight towards more just, accountable, and compassionate worlds we need to focus on the narratives and movements led by Indigenous peoples.

While working within movements for anti-oppression a framework of anti-colonialism is essential. Without historical and place-based knowledge of how the past is living within the present movements abolishing oppressive systems would only be perpetuating this same systemic violence’s that is complacent to the occupation of Indigenous lands and suppression of Indigenous struggles. In the essay, *Double Weaving Two Spirit Critiques*, Qwo-li Driskill discusses a notion of double weaving in a critique of intersectionality’s lack of colonial impact: “Double weaving privileges the voices and stories that colonial projects have attempted to destroy but that, hidden in a third space forgotten about by colonial cultures, survive” (Driskill 2016: 24). The concept of double weaving comes from the Cherokee Nation’s basket weaving practices where Driskill explains double woven baskets having two independent designs is a representation of Cherokee rhetoric’s that make possible the third space within the basket as Native centered Two Spirit, queer critiques (2016: 23-24). Working for Indigenous sovereignty

and anticolonial worlds is working towards an accountable and conscious mode of being. Driskill elaborates that “No understanding of sexual and gender constructions on colonized and occupied land can take place without understanding of the ways colonial projects continually police sexual and gender lines. Two Spirit critiques, then are necessary to understanding homophobia, misogyny, and transphobia in the Americas just as an analysis of queerphobia and sexism is necessary to understand colonial projects” (Driskill 2016:30-31). What anticolonialism means for me, as a non-Indigenous person existing in a settler colonial state will continually be evaluated in this research in order to uplift justice works that honor those authors and experiences who have nurtured resilience, accountability, and healing.

#### How Critically Queering Came to Be

*“Just as prison abolition is more than an anti-prison project, community accountability is more than an anti-violence project. It is a liberation project that creates space for autonomous radical transformation in our lives and communities, seeking to transform the roots of violence.” - Ana Clarissa Rojas Durazo 2011*

In this research I use the terminology to *critically queer*. I define critically queering as redefining the ways in which we exist and love through an active engagement with time, place, space, and representation, continuously working towards more just and accountable relationships with ourselves and others. This working definition encompasses various abolitionist, anti-state, queer theorists and activists before me. Again, there is a foregrounding theme in this research that is anti-state. This framework was built upon those testimonies and works that have tirelessly pointed out the state’s active participation in violence against those most marginalized. One essay that helped to

lay the ground work of understanding of what that meant through the intersections of critical race theory and queer theory is Cathy J. Cohens work in *Punks, Bulldagger, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics* as they explain “...If any truly radical potential is to be found in the idea of queerness and the practice to queer politics, it would be in opposition to dominant norms, a space where transformational political work can begin” (1997: 438). Encapsulating queerness as a practice beyond identity allows for a space of change, growth, and accountability.

To build upon queerness beyond individual identity Steven Dillon offers an incredible analysis of anti-carceralism and a mode of understanding queerness as a force in their piece *Escape-Bound Captives: race, neoliberalism, and the force of queerness*. “The radical potential of queerness does not lie in its ability to name the fact of embodying individually resistive gender or sexual identities but in its capacity to act as a force that could bring together ‘all those deemed marginal and all those committed to liberatory politics’” (Dillon 2018:14). What I’m getting at is that what has built queer theory for me is a series of narratives and experiences that have attempted to braid in the fact that queer can be a central and equivocal power in anti-oppression work. Too often has queer liberatory movements relied upon state’s “inclusion” on the notion of “equality”, falling into its limited, colonial imaginary and pushing those folx most vulnerable to state violence into experiencing increased harm. Addressing harm through community accountability has bloomed through the coalitional movements of transformative justice.

Transforming Relationships Through Justice, Community, and Self

My working understanding of transformative justice is a justice framework that is moved by the model that all involved are open to changing. Transformative justice is an active reimagining of what can be done to not only heal those who have been harmed but also heal those who have done harm, so as to stop cycles of violence. *The Revolution Starts at Home: Confronting Intimate Violence Within Activist Communities* (2016), a collection of essays compiled by survivors of abuse and comrades in organizing, was one of the most influential books in my life, which not only provided the testimonies of how the prison industrial complex is violent in and of itself but gave various examples of how justice and healing can be met without relying on state involvement. It was my first real exposure to how and why individual folx might be perpetuating violence and how essentially, in transformative justice, everyone needs to heal. In Pusey and mehrotra's (2016) essay they discuss the following:

...supporting a community and moving towards healthier relationships involves encouraging everyone to identify and unlearn their uses of violence and other unhealthy patterns, whether or not they are currently involved in an abusive relationship. And if we create community norms that encourage everyone to identify and unlearn their uses of violence we will likely prop open the door for some in our communities to misuse those norms to 'blame the victim' or deny wholesale the existence of survivor/ perpetrator dynamics in abusive situations. (pg. 145)

Pusey and mehrotra framed ways that we stop cycles of abuse within our communities and, in many ways, extended how state response was an expansion of settler colonial cisheteropatriarchy. *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Nonprofit Industrial Complex* compiled by INCITE!, is another excellent book, explaining how the state has produced nonprofits to build and continue the neoliberal and colonial project through

mass incarceration and medicalization. In the example of the chapter *Sisters in Action for Power* Amera H. Perez explains the formation of their nonprofit and the lessons they acquired in its growth. Perez pointed out the systemic problems with nonprofit funding incentives entrenched in the nonprofit industrial complex. To counter these systemic issues and still maintain resources for their community they “...used the pillars of colonization embedded in the national trends, comminate culture, and current state of mind and body in our society” (Perez 2007: 96). Weaving in past and present strategies for change they developed ways that actively dispersed power and decision making, decreased funding dependability of foundations or outside organizations, and centered collective ways to address burnout. Utilizing these strategies fuels more critical and transformative discussions when addressing change in the nonprofit industrial complexes. In the chapter *Native Organizing Before the Non-Profit Industrial Complex* by Madonna Thunder Hawk, they discuss cultivating transformative activism and their observations and involvement as an activist when nonprofits emerged. Their specific examples of non-dependence on state resources was a key point in their essay. Activism, as Hawk explains, has been co-opted: now folx ask for permission and organizations worry about funding being cut instead of focusing on the reason or because they are fighting for, “They start to unconsciously limit their imagination of what they could do” (Hawk 2007: 105). Hawk exemplifies how ways of organizing without incentivized funding is possible through shared resources, time, and distributions of wealth. In the chapter *We Were Never Meant to Survive*, Ana Clarissa Rojas Durazo highlights the plight of the nonprofit industrial complex through the fight by making visible the violence against women and

the development of the fourth world war. A fourth world war is described as the development of violence dispersed through the colonial market and, essentially, colonialism in “postcolonial” rhetoric. The anti-violence organization co-opted by the state perpetuates white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalist systems through the guise of liberalist projects and state incentives to combat violence. Durazo clearly states the non-profitization and anti-violence movements formed by the state enacts criminalization procedures to address violence, which inherently fuels the medical industrial complex along with the prison industrial complex. Durazo shares the distress of movements becoming more dependent upon funding, therefore falling into state control and models of immobilization through non profitization. These readings were imperative to my understandings of state violence and my rigid turn in *not* depending upon or centering state sanctioned response to harm happening in LGBTQ2SIA\* communities.

Mia Mingus a queer Korean writer, educator, community organizing, and activist for disability rights and transformative justice has been one of the most influential people in my frameworks, understanding, and practice of community/self-accountability. She recently visited Humboldt State University again as a keynote speaker to the 2020 Social Justice Summit. Mingus’ work has shaped the ways I recognize power and control systematically along with the ways I have recognized how it plays out in myself and surrounding communities. There are so many intricacies I want to talk about in Mingus’s work, but I’ll save it for sprinkling throughout the research. The main framework for transformative justice is through community/self-accountabilities 4 parts: self-reflection, apologizing, repair, and behavior change (Mingus 2020). These parts of accountability

build the ways in which we interact and grow with each other. They also reimagine the ways that transformative justice is lived.

The book *Joyful militancy: building thriving resistance in toxic times* by Carla Bergman and Nick Montgomery (2018) pulls from various conversations and interviews to provide definitions and contexts for how joy and militancy are interwoven and necessary in resistance movements. The term “Empire” is associated with the “organized destruction” to which we live and are interacting within us. It asks us to “Break down the divides between organizing and everyday life.” and start a conversation where constructs of joy and militancy are redefined. Joyful Militancy has many tools that can help break cycles of violence, not just recognition of broad social toxic narratives, but the resistance within ourselves. bergman and Montgomery (2018) help us to conceptualize transformative justice as a process that can be joyous and militant. Joyful militancy asks us to break dependence upon the state. That being said the fabric that holds the most vulnerable to the ability to live needs to be supported by relationships working with decentralized organizing. This demand focus on modes of trust and responsibility through transformative justice and accountability. Similar to *Joyful Militancy* themes, adrienne maree brown's work in the book *Emergent strategy: shaping change, changing worlds* she introduces emergent strategies as a way of navigating personal and social change and justice. She defines emergent strategies as a spectrum of recognizing the complexities of the world, functions, systems around us, and how they can intricately be shifted and reimaged within our own lives. My own understandings of abuse have grown to be an understanding of myself and my relationships. This research is intimately entwined with

my own experiences with abuse, control, and accountability tactics. Transformative justice and community/self-accountability frameworks are founded on how we work against systemic and social violence while uplifting the ways we can hold each other and ourselves in more tender ways.

### Conclusion

My research questions are grounded in theories of intersectional identity and body politics, as they emerge from the central concerns of queer studies, Indigenous studies, critical race studies, and transformative justice theories. I attempted to list specific authors as individual to each study, but it is impossible to separate one author from another web of study. All of these theories and sources are connected and lived through one another. I hope to uplift and centralize those theoretical frameworks that have been done before me. Queer liberations have always existed in the folds of Indigenous liberation, Black liberation, Peoples of Color liberation. So, as we untangle the web of queer theory its modes are also with anticolonial frameworks and critical race theories. As much of this research is discussing colonial violence, the anticolonial and Indigenous studies frameworks will be core to establishing how emotional abuse in LGBTQ2SIA\*\* communities have emerged through tactics of colonialism. Transformative justice and self/community accountability allow me to reimagine ways that anti-oppression work can blossom. The frameworks addressed have helped to build the ways that this research has been made alive.

The following is a spoken word compilation of expressing positionality in how I've come to this research through grounded theory and experience. I attempted to gather



themes shown through analysis such as validity in individual and cumulative experience, the continuum of accountability processes, various ways in which that is lived and relived-addressed and readdressed, along with a collective understanding of survivorship. These themes are highlighted through quotes drawn from each semi-structured interview. Summing up these themes the poem hopes to come full circle and find solace in the conception and reality of connection through queer paradoxes.

*this place, to stay*

*Breaching of bones and crushed velvet  
Mouths whispering airy dreams in my ears  
Vivid and cold, breath is ecstatic  
Goosebumps cover my skin  
And the hairs upon the nap of my neck rise  
Is this where their hands rested?  
At the hollow of my voice?  
Almost a moan if it wasn't a cry.  
Almost an erotic if it wasn't a retracing of trauma  
Touching for spots that might yet feel.  
Yet to decide where I want our lips to fall.  
Melting deep inside, have I been empty?  
Finding the wells bottom  
Wet, warm and galactic  
This place, maybe I'll stay.*

*A moment of depletion  
Stopping for loss and wondering where some inner cosmos went  
Hiding in the questions  
And grasping for memorials, maybe found in other lived bodies  
They were there, talking among themselves  
Somehow no one thought to recognize them,  
Though, they were felt.*

*Rambling on in gardens, seeking plants  
Craving something sweet and colorful, berry bushes speak  
"I just had this knowledge, just like crystallized from my experience" (strawberry,  
they/them, 25-35, White, queer).  
Crystallized like moon shards,  
Navigating toxic times, we grow together*

Mirroring each other's manifesting  
 Still in the gardens,  
 Craving something deep  
 Tender, like honey,  
 Trying to find it in our kitchen, just for a moment  
 "It's not just like an instant" (perdido, he/they, 25-35, queer). The lost shout out.  
 Crevices in cabinets hallowed by hurt echo  
 It is not just an instant.  
 Healing reverberates and chimes,  
 A bird sings sweetly craving stove makings  
 "It's constantly being negotiated and renegotiated in different spaces and at different  
 times" (Crow, they/them, 25-35, white, queer).  
 Some kind of soup will bath its wings  
 Something nourishing and rich  
 A big bowl.  
 In the garden.  
 Next to a flower.  
 Whose points are soft and sharp  
 "It's just like an automatic epistemology that everyone understands" (strelitzia nicolai,  
 he/him/his, 18-24, white, queer).  
 That the dirt is bitter but grows  
 That it craves seeds to be submerged in itself  
 Our lost gardens might be full,  
 Again,  
 Finding the wells bottom  
 Wet, warm and galactic  
 This place, maybe we'll stay.

## RESEARCH ALIVE: READING STORIES, GATHERING DATA

### Thesis Questions

1. *How does emotional abuse appear in LGTBQ2SIA\* relationships and communities? And in what ways has emotional abuse in LGTBQ2SIA\* communities been made invisible?*
2. *How has the patriarchy, gender binary, traditional monogamy, and hetero-centricism shaped tools of emotional abuse? And in what ways have these tools of abuse been used as parts of the settler colonial projects?*
3. *How have individuals and communities created community accountability tactics for emotional abuse? In what ways can queering love be a platform for anti-oppression work?*

### Description of the Research

In answering the research questions, I used qualitative mixed methodologies through lived and collective experience, otherwise known as ethnography. Using semi-structured interviews, surveys, and literature reviews I, along with the participants, have added the web of conversations in how emotional abuse appears in queer relationships and communities, in what ways emotional abuse tactics are tied to systemic violence, and how community accountability and critically queering has been utilized. In order to develop these discussions, there have been semi-structured interviews along with pieces of literature to answer how emotional abuse appears in *LGTBQ2SIA\** relationships and communities along with how emotional abuse in *LGTBQ2SIA\** communities has been

made invisible and normalized. Through the initial participants' narratives in the semi-structured interviews, a survey was created to expand the themes shared. The survey was created for LGBTQ2SIA\* folx to discuss emotional abuse in our communities and how they have been shaped by systemic forms of violence, along with self/community accountability tactics. The goal of this survey and this thesis is to better understand how emotional abuse in LGBTQ2SIA\* communities appear, how systemic violence shapes emotional abuse through settler colonial projects, and how we can create more self and community accountability tactics.

### Rationale In Research Design

The methodology of this research is similar to the literature review in the sense that I attempt to center folx that identify as LGBTQ2SIA\*. This is important to me because it is about the identities and communities that encompass those lived experiences. "Gayle Greene writes, 'Memory revises, reorders, refigures, resignifies; it includes or omits, embellishes or represses, decorates or drops, according to imperatives of its own'; she defines the aim of 'memory work' as 'stepping back into the past...to understand the process that makes us what we are and so to change what we are' (1991: 294,300)" (Rodriguez 2013:157). In memory work folx are able to reclaim their own histories and revitalize their living truths. In this, the power of research can be transformational. I hope to weave in the ways that Rodriguez and Risling Baldly have conducted their research by applying memory work as a fundamental role in research methodology and validity (Risling Baldly 2018, Rodriguez 2013). Rodriguez and Risling

Baldly have influenced this research by carving out their own individual experiences with memory work and how it can be lived collectively in research through folx participation and narratives. One of the ways I am able to centralize LGBTQ2SIA\* participants is reaching out to queer spaces in and outside the California State University (CSU) system, such as the Eric Rofes Center on Humboldt State University campus or Outer Space. I also connected through my own, friends, and personal connections to our communities. I designed the research to center queer experiences because this work begins with an acknowledgment of the existence of emotional abuse in LGBTQ2SIA\* communities. This is essential because there is not a lot of open discussion on emotional abuse, let alone in LGBTQ2SIA\* communities. Mariame Kaba and Shira Hassan (2019) have an incredible workbook for community accountability facilitators called *Fumbling Towards Repair*, highlighting the messy process of accountability through collective and coalitional means of addressing harm and carrying community. Fumbling is not neat, or tidy, and rarely is it comfortable. If you are constantly comfortable, how will you have known growth or change? In fumbling to answer *How does emotional abuse appear in lgbtq2sia\* relationships and communities? And in what ways has emotional abuse in lgbtq2sia\* have communities been made invisible?* The work to center and recognize emotional abuses active existence is imperative to addressing harm and creating more accountable spaces. The semi-structured interviews along with the survey give folx the opportunities to share how emotional abuse has been experienced and how it might be or have been addressed. The questions: *How has the patriarchy, gender binary, traditional monogamy, and hetero-centricism shaped tools of emotional abuse? And in what ways*

*have these tools of abuse been used as parts of the settler colonial projects?* navigate conversations and identity politics that draw in the tools that systemic and settler colonial violence that have framed emotional abuse tactics used in *LGTBQ2SIA\** communities. While there are alignments to how emotional abuse is experienced, the ways that *LGBTQ2SIA\** folx experience it within communities and relationships are unique.

In order to address harm happening in our communities the ways in which they are lived within and around us as parts of systemic abuses rooted in settler colonial projects, has been imperative to the process of addressing and unlearning harmful ways we have communicated and are in relation to one another. Attempting to answer the question *How have individuals and communities created community accountability tactics for emotional abuse? And in what ways can queering love be a platform for anti-oppression work?* involves rearticulating queerness and critical engagement. In both the semi-structured interviews and the survey participants were asked about their relationships with self/community accountability along with their relationships and understandings of resilience. This was necessary to ask because delving into the paradoxes of queerness allow for narrations of accountability, resilience, care, and anti-oppression work to occur.

#### Some Limitations of the Research

It is near impossible to address the full and intricate scopes of violence showing up in queer relationships. Even the terminologies and meanings of “queer relationships” can be continuously undone. I jump into the research acknowledging the vastness that has and will exist beyond this thesis. The research and the folx I worked with are individually

valid within their own experiences. Though the paper reflects interweaving alignments, which may account for some folx experiences, it is not a representation of all, nor do I wish to do so. The semi-structured interviews and survey questions were not geared towards asking survivors to relive or disclose their experiences with emotional abuse. That is not to say it is not talked about, but I do not feel like I have enough time and resources to create a space to facilitate triggering content within the realm of IRB approval. That being said, future work might centralize more dialogue within queer communities, perhaps developing a continuous resource and dialogue for addressing violence that encompasses emotional abuse accountability. Future research might also address in more detail the many other interesting experiences that come from *LGTBQ2SIA*\* abuse.

The survey was created in substitution for the focus groups I had planned early in this research development. I was no longer able to do in person facilitation due to the pandemic of COVID-19. The survey allowed for more folx from different geographical areas to participate, more room for reflection to answer in their own time, and obviously, the safety and wellbeing to stay home during this tumultuous time. Some of the limitations of the survey include that folx were not able to engage in conversation with one another. Also, because of the content shared, participants are anonymous. That said, for the majority of participants I was not able to follow up with questions. When the participants were asked about what they would have liked included that was perhaps missed in the survey and the interviews there were a few thoughts shared. Some participants shared that the survey should include a clear definition for emotional abuse

along with questions that might be more accessible to folx who may not know that emotional abuse is happening and more specific questions on what kinds of abuse (i.e., family versus intimate). If the focus groups were held we could have perhaps discussed more collectively what people's definitions were and been able to draw a clearer definition of emotional abuse. Folx shared that sometimes the broad questions get overwhelming and they don't know how to begin to answer them. That said a potential limitation to this research is that some folx may not have had a full understanding of what emotional abuse is or how accountability processes might be lived. Although these limitations exist, the experiences and stories shared by folx weave many possibilities in how we can address violence in the future, and I look forward to the continuum of carving out care work.

#### Methodologies of the Semi-Structured Interviews and Survey

The research conducted encompassed qualitative mixed methodologies through semi-structured interviews and a survey. The process of coming up with questions was through personal and collective knowledge and curiosity basis. Curiosity basis meaning the questions centered not only previous experiences and knowledge that myself and participants had but the feelings of curiosity that can drive us to lean into unknowing. Through peer review by folx in LGBTQ2SIA\* communities formatting the interview and interview questions allowed for them to be molded in ways that open more doors to how folx interact with the research along with the resources and services for those experiencing emotional abuse. The interviews drew answers to part of the question: *Through the perspective of folx working in the field of violence prevention, in what ways*



*does emotional abuse appear in queer relationships and communities? What resources are provided for folx experiencing emotional abuse?* While the survey questions were meant to gauge folx's personal and close experiences with emotional abuse in LGBTQ2SIA\* communities, how structural violence fuels emotional abuse, along with answering questions that inquired about what self and community accountability meant to them.

### Participants

Part of this research is based on four semi-structured interviews. I found the participants by being involved in shared community accountability and harm reduction spaces and epistemologies. I also emailed folx from organizing spaces that might be interested in being interviewed. I found those organizations by personal knowledge of resources and services provided to LGBTQ2SIA\* folx along with word of mouth and emailing departments. The participants from the semi-structured interviews chosen aliases are strawberry, perdido, strelitzia nicolai, and Crow. A way in which folx exercised joy and personhood was through their aliases, using them as a platform of spell work, disrupting the professionalism of research and helping to carve out more ways queer magic shows up. I define spells as the intentional actions of cultivating and building magic. Aliases can be a place of choice and imagination for folx to define, share, or hide in naming themselves-which again, can be also a place of joy and play when given the option. I attempted to center folx who individually identified as part of the LGBTQ2SIA\* identities. This is important to me because it is about the identities and communities that encompass those lived experiences.

The survey encompassed 26 participants, Fern, Sassi, Carlos, Dax, Will, Goldie, Tracy Turnblad, Saturn, Columbus, Jia, abalone, Lyle, Jane Exotic, Cai, Rob, Victoria, Sophia, Zero, Signy, Non-binary pal, Max, Alexis, Peache, Bozda, TanyX, and Ana. While the location of participants remained anonymous for safety reasons I reached out to various queer and cultural resource centers across the so-called united states to share and participate in the survey. When asking about their positionality half the participants were among the ages of 25-35 while 38.5% were 18-24 and 11.5% were above 50 years old. In the section asking about race/ethnicity identities (3.3% Native American, 16.7% Multiracial, 3.3% Mexican, Hispanic & Latinx/o/a 26.7%, Arab 3.3%, Asian 6.7%, Filipinx/o/a 3.3%, Black 3.3%, Igbo 3.3%, White 30%.) and how folx identified in the LGBTQ2SIA\* community (asexual 1.7%, nonbinary 6.9%, cupioromantic 1.7%, pansexual 8.6%, grey asexual 3.4%, gender queer 5.2%, masc 5.2%, gay 8.6%, lesbian 8.6%, queer 17.2%, trans 10.3%, agender 1.7%, bisexual 6.9%). The questions were framed for inputting short answers versus a list of answers to choose from. I did this because folx hold multiple identities and did not want folx to feel compartmentalized to choose one answer and erase other aspects of their vast identities and representations they may want to share. Although the answers representing the participants' various intersecting identities when quoting or referencing them in the research I make sure to keep all named identities as they were shared.

#### Interviews and Surveys Themselves

The interviews took place in public places that also encompassed privacy. These locations were discussed with participants and sometimes, depending on the day, took

place outside. Having locations not typical but also safe for all participants allowed for folx to feel more comfortable and less restricted to traditional institutions. I used a semi-structured guide to organize the interview questions. Although we covered every question there was a lot of intentional fluidity that went into every interview. This allowed the conversation to experiment with itself, taking a new form of life. I used constructivist grounded theory interviewing as there were emergent interactions through social developments throughout my interviews (Charmaz 2014: 91). This was also constructivist developed through mirroring and aligning language used when talking through the emotional depth that showed up before, during, and after the interviews. Many of the interviews have engaged with joyful militancy. Joyful militancy has many tools that help break cycles of violence not just through recognition of broad social toxic narratives but also through the resistance within us (Bergman, Montgomery 2018). In the discussions with participants many ways we name violence within friendship, freedom, ethics, and affinity, especially in LGBTQ2SIA\* communities, along with how we can address it through community accountability became apparent.

The survey was a bit more difficult to engage directly with folx because I had to utilize my own interpretations of what they were explaining in text and anonymously. Names, language, and stories have always been central to research. I hope that I represented them in ways that reflected the participants own stories. Though some participants did not engage as fully in answering the questions many others shared in depth experiences and stories that lead the research in a multitude of worlds, visions, and realities for folx. I have also been attempting to keep open communication about how and

what their stories will be continuing to. This research received IRB approval and informed consent was sought from all participants, as well as the option to withdraw at any time.

### Interview and Transcript Coding Procedures

One of the first adjustments in the interview process was realizing the folx I wanted to be having conversations with are LGBTQ2SIA\* folx that are addressing harm within their own communities. They may or may not have been involved directly with nonprofits that provide emotional abuse support, but the stories I wanted to have were with folx working against binary healing. Working against a binary healing means working from a place that recognizes that healing is not a linear process and that folx are not working within emotional landscapes of the “healed” and “unhealed”. The emotional landscapes of healing are vast differential geographies to whom can be individually and collectively carved. Another aspect of analysis was editing the transcripts of the participants. I found the amount of filler words such as “like”, “um”, or “I don’t know” had been used quite a bit. It got me thinking a lot about the ways that they are used to reflect things that we are socialized not to have knowledge about and the beauty in not knowing things. You can be grounded and still grow. “Like” unintentionally used to reach alignments and connections with things and one another, to grasp at ways of understanding and web making. Through the works of Risling Baldly I hope to also deviate from the practice of dissection specifically in regard to participants voices and experiences (Risling Baldly 2017). Keeping participants' voices and presence in the transcriptions can be powerful in the way's representation helps to cultivate participants'

relationships with their own stories as well as maintaining the practices of anticolonial epistemologies. In similar relation to the interview quotes the survey participants texts were also undissected and left whole. This was so that readers were able to read the full context of where the participants were coming from along with removing myself from their testimonies. The analysis of the experiences shared validated emotional abuse that occurs and gave space for folx to discuss what emotional abuse meant for them.

### Positionality and Epistemology

Grounded theory in ethnography is also a key portion of the methodologies used in this research. As a pansexual, fluid asexual, gender queer, polyamorous human who has experienced abuse, and who has been working for harm reduction and community accountability tactics; my existence shapes how I approach this research, which draws from grounded theory. I am a part of this research. The participants I have talked to are also a part of this research. It is my story. It is their story. It is our story. Ours weaved in with stories told before. Complexing the ways that we interact with work and representation demands the transformative justice that accountability has been calling for. Risling Baldly discusses a theme to “(re)write, (re)right, and (re)rite” (2018: 142). By this Risling Baldly implies it can be an encompassing of the histories to which already have been written, have already been a right, and have already been ritualized. Reimagination for cultivating narratives beyond the dominant calls for a recognition and respectful use of the stories that are represented within research.

## CONTEXTUALIZING

## Framing Accountability and Home

One of the most fundamental literatures in this research is *The Revolution Starts at Home: confronting intimate violence within activist communities* (Chen, Dulani, Piepzna-Samarasinha, Smith 2016). The book emphasizes and gives tools in how to address violence when it is happening in communities and provides various examples for transformative justice. The method of transformative justice allows for not only accountability and healing but a transformation of community and persons. If we are able to navigate systems of healing trauma through survivor centeredness and transformative justice we can also imagine a place in which cycles of violence may be unlearned. The entirety of the book will most definitely be utilized but some parts perhaps more than others. One of the chapters I will be applying is the method of self-accountability addressed in *The Secret Joy of Accountability*: “I want my radical queer and trans communities to understand the violence we do to each other. I want us to understand our own words and stories. I want us to find healing in the ways we are doing it better, and I want us to create spaces for healing all around us” (Parez-Darby, Chen, Dulani, Piepzna-Samarasinha, Smith 2016: 113). This, for me, spoke to the premise of why I want to continue the thesis work I chose. Defining ways in which our interpersonal relationships connect to the epistemologies we each hold allows us to uplift a level of power in the ways that we are able to make change, not only socially, but within ourselves. Meaning, the communication and needs we have in our relationships are rooted in our own theories

and by recognizing that connection it helps to define and change the ways we connect with ourselves and others. While *The Revolution Starts at Home* introduces some of the ways that LGBTQ2SIA\* abuse tactics are utilized, it also briefly discusses systemic barriers.

### Systemic Barriers

Systemic barriers to accessing support for LGBTQ2SIA\* folx is especially important in my research because many resources and services for LGBTQ2SIA\* folx have been institutionalized to perpetuate violence. Funding and aid have been an integral part of institutionalizing support and resources for folx experiencing harm. In the book *No More Heroes: grassroots challenges to the savior mentality*, the author Jordan Flaherty explains the issues behind institutionalized support through various folx personal and collective experiences. Flaherty suggests that "Any aid that is not accountable to the community it seeks to serve, and does not address the fundamental systemic issues behind the problem it claims to address, will only reinforce an unjust system" (2006: 51). Through a recognition of history within intimate partner violence it is apparent that not only have most resources and services for folx experiencing intimate partner violence not included access for LGBTQ2SIA\* folx but also increase criminalization in response to LGBTQ2SIA\* communities experiences of violence to justify supporting the prison industrial complex. The book *The Revolution Will Not be Funded* illuminates that funding keeps power hierarchy controlled by elites, pushes competition within movements, and upholds systemic harm. In Durazo's chapter "We were never meant to survive", she clearly states the non-ratification and anti-violence movements formed by

the state, enhances criminalization procedures to address violence, which, in effect, fuels the medical industrial complex along with the prison industrial complex (INCITE 2007: 120). Durazo shares the distress of movements becoming more dependent upon governmental and private funding, therefore falling easily into state control and models of immobilization through non profitization (INCITE! 2007: 126). The state has made funding a continuous cycle of violence, because that is where profit and exploitation can be found.

When state and social systems uphold colonial ideologies of profit and exploitation in institutions, violence reverberates and is perpetuated through emotional and physical force. Systemic colonial frameworks that are dependent upon state involvement and criminalization utilize tools to exert control over people most vulnerable to the state. The non-profit industrial complex has been utilized as a tool where the state can justify their violence and suggest solutions to harm that are violent. “If all of our ‘solutions’ are tinkering within the system, how can we truly imagine, let alone build a better world?” (Flaherty 2006: 19). We need to be practicing accountability processes outside of inherently violent frameworks. Doing so not only uplifts transformative care with one another but also actively rejects state sanctioned violence that is guised as part of antiviolent movements. *In Our Hands: Community Accountability as Pedagogical Strategy*, Durazo states “When the state enters the frame as an ally of the antiviolence movement, the omnipresence of violence is disregarded, allowing the state to evade scrutiny and accountability for its role in orchestrating and deploying countless forms of violence against Latinas, women of color, queer, and trans folks” (Durazo 2011-12, 81).



Flaherty and Durazo demand a recognition of how institutionalized anti-violence work attempts to address harm by utilizing the tools of the oppressors, which only perpetuates cycles of harm.

The participants' stories that have been shared in this research add to the conversations and critiques of state involvement in anti-oppression work and also provide experiences and literatures that reflect the modes of actively moving against the profitization of struggles. In the *Abolition Journal* (2015), the abolition statements encompass a variety of folx personalized structural definitions, along with lived experiences, of what abolition is for them. Overall, they talk about the structural means of abolishing state violence and other oppressive structures. Many of the statements focus on the abolitionist necessity to reimagine structures of being without the dependence of oppression of others. Centering not only the dismantling of the prison industrial complex, but also the creations and building of new worlds. One of the main discourses is based within abolitionist theory, folx testimonies of incarceration are detrimental to anti-oppression work. Critical analysis and praxis allow us to deconstruct how the state has led mass carceral movements under guises of anti-violence work. Working from modes of abolitionism also allows us to reimagine and remember what accountability can look like without the perpetuation of harm and how critically queering has and can be a place of transformation.

### Critically Queering Accountability in Relationships

In the margins of accountability and queerness there are frameworks of anti-oppressive movements. In my research I define critically queering as redefining the ways

in which we exist and love through an active engagement with time, place, space, and representation, continuously working towards more just and accountable relationships with ourselves and others. Re-establishing language, identity, and experience has helped to shape ways that we might be able to navigate worlds with more compassion and accountability. The frameworks that challenge criminalization and the state within methodologies such as queer, abolitionist, and emergent strategies can help us to unlearn harm. In these ways critically queering love challenges patriarchy, the gender binary, traditional monogamy, and heterocentrism in anti-oppressive work. Being able to navigate from places of expansion destabilizes the Empires' hold on our feelings. There is a recognition of collective and diverse transformation on platonic and intimate existences, that call for soft, sharp approaches that start where people are at. Queerness is extended to encompass not just identities but action and in some ways, a life force.

There are many authors, activists, artists, poets: transformational folx to which engage and enlighten the depth of how critically queering can feel within ourselves as well as collectively. Beverly Tatum uses the metaphor of a moving walkway, describing racism as a systemic power constantly moving in a direction, if people are moving with the walkway they are actively engaging in racism, if they don't do anything about racism they are still moving, so the only way to work against racism is going against the walkway (Tatum 2003, 11-12). In this metaphor Tatum reflects how racism works, but also how it is applicable to most systemic violence. It is necessary to be working against the walkways of violence in order to address any forms of harm. Even when we are complacent, we are engaged. Audre Lorde plays with critically queering through the

sensation of erotic “I find the erotic such a kernel within myself. When released from its intense and constrained pellet, it flows through the colors of my life with a kind of energy that heightens and sensitizes and strengthens all my experience” (Lorde 2000: 185).

Judith Butler's critically queering is presented through performativity in which we are reverberatory: “To say that gender is performative is a little different because for something to be performative means that it produces a series of effects” (Butler 2006).

Montgomery and berman envelope critically queering through joyful militancy in which our self-reflections are weaved within accountability processes that centralize the tender and sharp ways to show up for ourselves and our communities. In these ways, critically queering is surrounding our modes of existence to challenge the harmful ways in which the Empire, or state, has infiltrated worlds. Within these works and others, I hope to contribute to conversations, in and outside academics, centralizing accountability and compassion politics.

#### LGBTQ2SIA\* Abuse as a Part of Settler Colonial Projects

There have been countless and continuous works led by Indigenous peoples on how violent tools of settler colonialism encompassed the creation and enforcement of the gender binary, heteronormativity, and monogamy. Especially in the narratives written by Native feminist theorists. Jennifer Nez Denetdale describes that “Indigenous feminist and queer analysis demonstrates how the spaces of the domestic and intimate are also sites of colonial surveillance and control, thereby gendering settler colonialism” (2017:72).

Undoing the ways that emotional violence is lived within us, knowing where those tactics

of abuse are rooted, means a fierce disruption of colonialism and white supremacy as they are a fundamental part of how and why harm is perpetuated.

Native feminist theories reveal that a key aspect of the relentlessness of settler colonialism is the consistency and thus naturalization of heteropatriarchy and hetero paternalism. The heteropaternal organization of citizens into nuclear families, each expressing a 'proper' Modern sexuality, has been a Cornerstone in the production of a citizenry That will support and bolster the nation-state. Thus, as settler Nations sought to disappear Indigenous people's complex structures of government and kinship, the management of Indigenous people's gender roles and sexuality was also key and remaking Indigenous peoples into settler state citizens. (Arvin, Tuck, Morrill 2013)

While many have moved towards conversations of queer 'inclusion' or 'diversity', the recentering of Indigenous experiences and anticolonialism is imperative to addressing violence in LGBTQ2SIA\* communities. Denetdale discusses in an essay on how marriage and sexuality were a tool of colonization and assimilation in the making of the modern Navajo Nation.

Under American colonial rule, Native Peoples faced constant condemnation of relationships that fell outside of the binaries of heterosexuality. Recognition of multiple genders was considered sexual transgression. Violence was shown to Navajos, as the uprising narratives depicts, if they did not conform to American practices around gender, family, marriage, and sexuality and was so thorough that any variation in Navajo practices outside of nuclear family units, heterosexuality, and monogamy appeared to have passed" (2017: 87-88).

Although there have always been, are, and will always be Indigenous queer peoples leading the conversations on settler colonialism being at the root so much of the violence toward LGBTQ2SIA\* movements have been whitewashed and modernized to fit into a history that does not allow for the intersect of colonization. In scott lauria morgensen's book *spaces between us: queer settler colonialism and Indigenous decolonization* they deconstruct the myth of "newness" in queer movements.

Yet historicizing native queer and two spirit activisms as if arose only in response to colonial hegemony suggests that native resistance is always already derivatives of what it resists: the totalizing power of settler colonization. In fact, by definition, settler colonialism is *a relationship* between something that may attempt to totalities and all that it attempts (forever incompletely) to suppress. (2011:51)

The inseparable histories to settler colonialism and queerness does not mean a reason for its existence but the relationship to how it currently exists, especially in the context of emotional abuse and accountability practices. While the research has been addressing emotional abuse in LGBTQ2SIA\* communities, the critical engagement with how queer studies need anticolonial narratives in theory and praxis is imperative to building collective and coalitional works. Unlearning the harm, we cause one another and moving towards accountable and critically compassionate communities means also coming from a place of anti-colonialism. This means an active recentering of where tactics of emotional abuse are coming from and how the colonial projects of white monogamous cis-heteropatriarchal relationships are lived in the communication we have with one another.

## CHAPTER ONE: EMOTIONAL ABUSE IN LGBTQ2SIA\* COMMUNITIES

In this chapter there are multiple, interlocking forms and conditions of abuse explained: (1) ways folx within a relationship exert power over each other, (2) ways in which systems of cisheteronormative power operate on and within the relationship, and (3) the terms by which abuse is understood, and (4) how politics of disposability manifest and operate within interpersonal relationships.

### Emotional Abuse as Structural and Social Surveillance

There are many ways that emotional abuse exists. Humiliation, scrutiny, shaming, isolation, manipulation, and gaslighting are some of the main ways in which folx exert power and control over one another. We can find that these exertions are so entrenched in u.s. settler colonial culture that once aware of them it is a constant undoing of yourself and the worlds around you to unlearn these tactics. Although some of these tactics of abuse are talked about, the ways that they intrinsically appear in queer relationships are often normalized and overlooked for various reasons, many of which uphold the systems of power exerted by settler colonial ideologies. In any kind of anti-oppression work the roots of settler colonialism must be centralized. The systems of violence found within patriarchy, gender binary, hetero-centricism, and monogamy can be traced to u.s. settler colonialism.

In the Empire there are systems of power such as the patriarchy that use systemic violence, i.e., misogyny, to uphold that power. There are then motives for social control that constructs gender binary, utilizing transphobia as a tool of violence. In Judith Butler's

works on gender performativity in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* she describes the constructions of expectations of bodies and their politics of representation (Butler 2006). Butler also cites specifically, performativity as a strategy of survival but also a means of resistance to dominant narratives- life through expression and revisitation (Butler 2006). Queer bodies are constantly politicized by the outside. What you wear, how you wear it, and who you are read as, are paradoxes of identity that are constantly coming into question.

The power in breaking the gender binary is the reclamation of oneself and body as a sense of resilience and power. Performativity encompasses not just the constructs of clothes but the cultural meaning behind them and the ways in which they are acted within and around (Butler, 2006). Heterocentrism also normalizes the gender binary while perpetuating homophobia because LGBTQ2SIA\* identities are framed not only to be nonexistent but wrong, leaving folk vulnerable to being recipients of violence. The construction of monogamy by settler colonial states can be understood as a means of exerting power over each other and setting rules in order to keep each other under control. There are also concrete privileges associated with conforming to colonial monogamy, such as marriage rights, tied to state and property rights. In the discourses of power and socialization patriarchy, gender binary, hetero-centrism, and colonial monogamy perpetuate violence through misogyny, transphobia, homophobia, and exertion of control in intimate relationships. Abuse is only framed as happening between cis-hetero couples, in which the man is always the perpetrator and the woman is always the survivor. That is, obviously, incorrect, but it is a dangerous misconception that has

bled into, not only structural access to resources and services, but also the ways that LGBTQ2SIA\* communities have disregarded violence happening within them.

These social misconceptions and violent ramifications, that are within systems of violence, show themselves intrinsically connected through the relationships we have with one another. In adrienne maree brown's book *Emergent Strategy* she highlights, "Humans have made us a hierarchy of value in which some people are disposable-can fail at being human, can be killed as a punishment, can be collateral damage. Can be wasted. Or tortured. Or locked in a box for their whole lives, given no hope of transformation, or a future in society" (adrienne maree brown 2017: 132). To this, adrienne maree brown makes a powerful connection to not only the internalized ways people are emotionally disposable but also the ways in which states have formed the prison industrial complex for capturing and caging folx, while also stifling their futurity. In Avery Gordon's piece *Some Thoughts on Haunting and Futurity* she talk about a social death that happens to folx that have been or are incarcerated. While there is an active attempt to make prisoners no longer exist the prison industrial complex also perpetually relies upon the exploitation and labor of their lives (Gordon 2011: 11). In this sense the continual criminalization of marginalized communities is about the preservation of slavery *and also* an extension of how the state seeps into social fabrics of life. In *City of Inmates* the author discusses how the formation of prisons was built upon imprisoning Indigenous peoples as a colonial tool of disappearance and slavery (Hernandez 2017). This history and present reality of how and why the state has formed prisons also encompasses the forms of constructed racialized violence that resides in US settler colonial society. In these places and spaces



of recognition we can also work on unlearning the margins of state within us. I hope to address the means in which state sanctioned agencies have attempted to profit off of abuse, in what ways abuse is learned, and how critically queering self and collective accountability can be a space of anti-oppression and care work.

### The Feelings of Abuse Culture Reverberated

*“While there is no set standard definition for emotional abuse within the context of intimate relationships, it can be understood as the ‘use of verbal and nonverbal communication with the intent to harm another person mentally or emotionally, and/ or to exert control over another person.’ These abusive actions can span a wide range of behaviors including threats, coercive control, verbal aggression, and exploitation” (Guadalupe-Diaz 2019, 69).*

In this thesis many folx were asked to share what their experiences were with emotional abuse. In part of the survey given it asked about emotional abuse and systemic violence. The participants engaged with questions that highlighted folx experience with emotional abuse and the interwoven realities of various forms of systemic violence that create barriers and perpetuate harm. As discussed previously, in the limitations of this research, folx were not provided an explicit definition of emotional abuse therefore all questions were working with their own understanding of what emotional abuse means for them. To gauge participants' personal experiences with emotional abuse, I asked the question: *Have you ever experienced emotional abuse?* Out of the 26 participants 84.6% of them have experienced emotional abuse while 7.7% answered no and 7.7% were unsure. I also asked *Do you know someone who also identifies as LGBTQ2SIA\* that has experienced emotional abuse?* 88.5% answered yes while the remaining 11.5% answered that they did not know. This information reflects the reality that many folx who are

LGBTQ2SIA\* experience emotional abuse and have known LGBTQ2SIA\* folx who also experience emotional abuse.

When participants shared what experiences, they had accessing support when going through emotional abuse many discussed a feeling of isolation due to lack of resources for folx in LGBTQ2SIA\* communities. Many resources and services that address emotional abuse are framed to normalize monogamous, hetero, cis people's experiences. This leaves out folx who identify or have experiences in emotional abuse that are not within monogamous, hetero, cis identities. One participant shared their experience with attempting to access support actually perpetuating harm.

...when it's (emotional abuse) happening, you can feel really alone. There are plenty of support groups for women but none for people who fit outside of that boundary. Even as someone who is femme presenting I don't want my personal experiences and traumas to be boxed in with the "women" label because that's not who I am. That is not who experienced those traumas. (Tracy Turnblad they/them, 18-24, Hispanic, Queer)

Tracy Turnblad's experience is not isolated. Many participants felt that the access to support heightened their vulnerability to other social and systemic violence's. A few of the support systems mentioned involved support from friends, though as many of the participants point out a part of emotional abuse is social isolation. Guadalupe-Diaz explains how social powers might form how abuse is experienced, "Well, the social and cultural context facilitate and make possible these attacks against gender variance, the power used to control and manipulate victims is constructed through the use of existing language regardless of the abuser's characteristics. Whether the abusers were cisgender

or not, the existing genderist and transphobic social and cultural context foster the opportunity for these abuses occur” (2019:84). Through Guadalupe-Diaz’s analysis contextualizing abuse specific to these identities additional questions asked how LGBTQ2SIA\* folx experience emotional abuse differently than folx who do not identify as LGBTQ2SIA\*. In most answers to the question of how LGBTQ2SIA\* might experience emotional abuse differently that do not identify as such, the participants shared various experiences of discriminations against LGBTQ2SIA\* individuals and communities.

There may be extra layers to them (folx who are experiencing emotional abuse) obtaining helpful resources that in some situations may require them to unsafely or uncomfortably "out" themselves. Not every emotional abuse resource double as a queer resource. There are emotional abuse resources and programs that are biased against queer folx or are otherwise heteronormative in some way. (Saturn she/her, 25-35, latinx, bisexual)

There are fewer safe people and/or institutions accessible to these folx. E.g., when I (a cis woman) have dated a cis man, I feel like most people and/or organizations will both relate and feel comfortable addressing my issue. They can identify with my dynamic to some degree; it's relatable. If they are aware that I am queer however, or my partner is not a cis man, they might react differently. I have a mental chart of who I KNOW has identified themselves as an ally and who has not made that clear. It means I have already learned to compartmentalize my queer conversations/issues, and only bring them up when I feel absolutely safe, so if abuse comes up within a queer dynamic, I am less likely to seek help. The only thing worse than the vulnerability of admitting to abuse is being abused further by the confidante. There are also pressures in the queer community to keep things within the community, as well as popular/unpopular opinions, and social divisions between groups (e.g., gay men and lesbian women). (Sassi, she/her/they/them, 25-35, White, Pansexual)

What I read from Saturn and Sassi's experiences is this constant fear and balancing act that we, LGBTQ2SIA\* folx, have to exist in when we are in places that are constantly telling us that we are the "other". Social normalizations of emotional abuse in LGBTQ2SIA\* relationships have been consistent in sending messages that harm against us and in our communities is acceptable. One participant shares her experiences with culture and media representation of emotional abuse in LGBTQ2SIA\* communities.

In my experience, because my abuser was a cis woman, I had no role models in popular culture / media for what it looks like for a woman to be the perpetrator of any kind of abuse, let alone emotional abuse. The only examples I had were physically abusive straight men harming women in Lifetime movies. And in queer women's media, in particular *The L Word*, emotional abuse between women was ROUTINELY normalized and made to seem funny or normal. These impressions shaped my understanding of queer relationships, especially as my emotional abuser was also my first relationship and I had nothing else to compare my experiences to. (Sophia, she/her, 25-35, white, queer)

Sophia's examples of media representations in how abuse has been narrated in LGBTQ2SIA\* communities exemplify the depth at which harm has been made acceptable. Most queer representations that I ever saw also were entrenched in toxic pattern of control, jealousy, and manipulations-often made comical and palatable for the cis heteronormative gaze, all the while teaching LGBTQ2SIA\* that emotional abuse, even physical abuse is okay. Again, there is disproportionate inaccessibility of support for LGBTQ2SIA\* folx experiencing harm. Another participant discusses support from LGBTQ2SIA\* folx families being, in many cases, nonexistent along with the reality that many LGBTQ2SIA\* folx have carved out other means of family to survive and be supported.

We have fewer places to go. Therefore, a common form of emotional abuse is exclusion from lgbtq2sia\* spaces. In addition, we don't usually have supportive families so the relationships we form are so much more important to us. Desirability defines if you live or die. Without friends or partners or chosen family or insert other relationship, you could end up homeless or starving or trapped. Plus being in a world where few accept you it's easy to embrace abusive relationships and think this is the best you'll get. (Goldie, they/them, 25-35, Black/Igbo, Agender & non-binary, bi, aromantic spectrum, asexual spectrum, polyamorous)

The notion of desirability that Goldie brings up in regard to how you live, or die is necessary to recognizing the severity of how emotional abuse and lack of support for LGBTQ2SIA\* can exist. It is imperative to have support systems in order to emotionally and physically survive in this colonial state. The following excerpts from participants expand on several barriers LGBTQ2SIA\* folx have when experiencing emotional abuse. LGBTQ2SIA\* folx who are experiencing or have experienced emotional abuse not only lack resources to address the harm, there is also a layer of isolation when fearing that talking about the abuse would disrupt the support survivors of abuse might have in their LGBTQ2SIA\* community.

I think that it's harder to identify and seek help. If you feel like there are not many available potential friends or partners maybe you stay with someone who is bad for you longer instead of leaving them since you might be worried about finding someone afterwards. (Max he/him, 18-24, mixed, transgender man, queer, bisexual, polyamorous)

There may even be bi-phobia within the LGBTQ+ community along with trans-phobia and ace-phobia. This adds onto the emotional abuse from the peers they thought were on their side. (Bozda they/them, 18-24, Hispanic/White, pan-romantic, grey-asexual, and genderfluid)

Isolation from community, lack of knowing if it is emotional abuse, feeling like you have to stay or minimizing because abuser is also lgbtq2sia identifying (Non-binary Pal, They/Them, 25-35, Asian, Non-binary, masculine of center, queer, non-monogamous)

Communities kind of being, I don't know if this is the right word, but like, self-contained by necessity for survival. So that makes it difficult to break those cycles. (strawberry, they/them, 25-35, White, queer)

The examples that the participants brought up exemplify the reasons and variance in why LGBTQ2SIA\* folx stay in partnership or community when experiencing harm. The fear of outing someone within communities that are already systematically marginalized by colonial states, as being abusive or violent has long been a struggle for LGBTQ2SIA\* survivors. It's difficult to address harm in our communities because of the fear in losing or no longer being a part of the supportive communities, we strive to have, let alone the fear of state response or involvement. "Our attention to how life chances are distributed rather than simply to what the law says about marginalized groups exposes how various moments of administrative categorization have lethal consequences" (Spade 2015:74). Through the systems of criminalization and state making that disproportionately affects the most marginalized communities, emotional abuse is in constant relation to how it is lived and utilized. In the following quotes participants share how different forms of systemic violence shape tactics of emotional abuse in LGBTQ2SIA\* communities.

I think in some cases, people mimic the traditional hierarchies of their parents in relationships. Also, the possessiveness of monogamous relationships is toxic. I am not monogamous but have had girlfriends who seem to value it to a toxic extent. I think this is a result of fear and trying to fit into a box that we are too big for. (Jane Exotic she/her/hers, 25-35, white, lesbian)

I think as a trans person, we experience a lot of transphobia within the lgbt community from cis queer people. Same with being bisexual and having lesbians and gays be prejudice against that. (Max he/him, 18-24, mixed, transgender man, queer, bisexual, polyamorous)

I see the gender binary as a contributing factor. This doesn't apply to everyone, but some folx might take on more violent, aggressive or less sensitive roles in performing masculinity, especially if they feel the need to "make up" for masculinity because they have been misgendered or compared to others. For some who have learned monogamy as a strict male-female role dynamic, they may mimic some behaviors because it's the only example of partnership they have seen. (Sassi, she/her/they/them, 25-35, White, Pansexual)

Patriarchy: Cis-men and AMB/non-binary folks perpetuating the same systems of patriarchy when engaging with other femme-identified folks. White supremacy: when queer identities are not intersectional and don't take into account the privilege and power dynamics that can come up in a poly relationship (including the use of social capitol as well as white privilege). (Ana, she/they, 25-35, mixed poc, queer)

All of those combined (the gender binary, patriarchy, traditional monogamy, and heterocentrism) are what have formed the systemic violence. It is all a part of the society we are in within the United States. Yes, we have a bit more legroom than other countries around the world. However, there is so much of our culture erased. That due to gender binary along with hetero-centrism, other cultures who normalized gender being fluid and loving whoever they wanted to love. Not many people have heard of being two-spirited or speak about homosexuality on the rise within Greek and Roman culture. So many people in power only take what they want from history. Often it is the victors who tell history. The history they want to shape their society. History has several perspectives, and so much of the population ignore that. (Bozda they/them, 18-24, Hispanic/White, pan-romantic, grey-asexual, and genderfluid)

In sharing their perspectives and experiences on how emotional abuse has been fueled and shaped through colonial structural and social violence some participants also disclosed how these would be used as tactics in emotionally abusive relationships.

Some LGBTQ2SIA\* folx don't have a connection to friends and family and their partner could be a big part of their life and threaten to leave them to be all alone. Also abuse that has to do with dead naming, outing them, misgendering, and any

other tactics (even sexual) to make their partner uncomfortable. (Fern, she/they, 18-24, Arab, queer/bi-sexual/pansexual)

In my experience, I would say that my ex weaponized social justice language to excuse her abuse, in particular making me feel guilty for questioning her behavior and its connection to her documented mental illnesses by acting like any discussion of that reality was ableist. (Sophia, she/her, 25-35, white, queer)

The ways in which the participants shared their understanding of how emotional abuse is shaped through systemic violence's led into participants' experiences of how emotional abuse has been lived in their relationships. While discussing how systems of violence have shaped emotional abuse the participants were also asked to share what other identities and experiences influence emotional abuse in LGBTQ2SIA\* communities. Folx named an expansive list: race, class, ability, citizenship status, sexism, physical size, ethnicity, desirability, gender, sexuality, childhood traumas, personal insecurities, not having a high libido, ignorance, intergenerational trauma, religion, power and control dynamics, age, gender expression, financial stability, mental health, acceptance, acknowledgement, upbringing, SES, bi erasure, conflation with pansexuality, non-consensual polyamory. The question was extremely broad and intentionally so. It asked folx to share their own understandings of how emotional abuse shows up in their life. Further questions posed to participants included how emotional abuse affects relationships, not just with other people but with themselves as well. Many of the participants had in depth understandings of how emotional abuse can affect folx mental health and well-being along with the reverberating effects on how those emotional traumas might interact with folx outside of themselves.



It (emotional abuse) can cause internalized homophobia or have folx go with the flow and not realize the damage they are doing to themselves and others (Dax they/them, 18-24, Native American, Non-binary, Grey asexual, cupioromantic)

I think emotional abuse has a deep emotional impact. As someone who was with an abusive partner it has taken me years of working on myself to finally feel any sort of confident. It affects even friendships, the trust with people is gone. There is self-shame, I hated that I let myself get in that situation. I hated myself for a long time because of the actions of one person and I think that emotional abuse specifically gets swept under the rug too often. This type of abuse also isn't only derived from a partner, but it could also be felt within friendships or with any caregiver position. Families can also be abusive in ways that can have developmental effects on children/teens in the community and I think that those relationships often get stereotyped as being normal. (Tracy Turnblad they/them, 18-24, Hispanic, Queer)

It can be detrimental to people's self-esteem and sense of self and perpetuates people in these communities not having the resources to understand how to have healthy respectful relationships. (Cai they/them/theirs, 18-24, Mexican/Latinx, pansexual, demi gender/genderfluid)

For relationships with themselves, this can cause so much self-hatred. Of wondering why, they had to be on this path. Why they just had to make it harder for themselves and couldn't be "normal". This kind of thinking can also transfer into relationships. One can fear that they are unable to be loved. That if they were to admit wanting bottom and/or top surgery, their partner(s) or future partner(s) would reject them. Or become disgusted. That the person would focus more on their sex and not who they are as a person. Not stay for THEM. Some people even force relationships onto themselves, which can cause crippling anxiety and guilt. That to be happy they need someone to give them affection and soothe them, since they cannot do that for themselves. That isn't right for them or the people they are with. Even if it is with a romantic relationship or platonic. (Bozda they/them, 18-24, Hispanic/White, pan-romantic, grey-asexual, and genderfluid)

You can't trust anyone, yourself included. You constantly hold back and wait for people to betray you. Words that seem innocuous to others become red flags. Sometimes you're right. Sometimes that person is using this cause or that ideal to do a lot of harm. Other times you find yourself trying to destroy relationships that you want to keep because you are scared. (Goldie, they/them, 25-35, Black/Igbo, Agender & non-binary, bi, aromantic spectrum, asexual spectrum, polyamorous)

It impacted self-esteem and feelings of sexual desirability, in my case. My ex's gaslighting also impacted my ability to trust in my perception of reality over time. (Sophia, she/her, 25-35, white, queer)

It's tricky. For myself it became harder to trust other people because of my past emotional abuse. My nervous system is always at the point where I feel like I'm in danger, when in reality I'm safe and I'm just talking to other people. (Jia, she/they, 25-35, Asian/Filipino, Lesbian, Queer, Pansexual)

It can affect someone's self-esteem, self-worth, they can internalize their own negative thoughts and then perpetuate harm onto others in the community creating a redundant cycle of violence. (abalone, he/him, 18-24, white, trans masc)

As all of the participants share emotional abuse can be a continuous cycle of self-deprecation that echoes even when you are no longer with or around folx that have done harm. It is a tumultuous and necessary process of understanding how harmful tactics show up. Jia explains manipulation through the terminology of trickery while Sophia explains it as affecting the perception of reality. I found these examples important to address as many emotional abuse tactics do come from warping people's perception, tricking them into believing things that are not true or making folx doubt what they personally experienced. These tactics of emotional abuse are important to highlight because they can force us to internalize harm. Abuse that warps our realities can manipulate us into believing that we are not good enough to deserve kindness, love, or community. Emotional abuse has devastating and lasting impacts not only on the people directly experiencing it but on communities as a whole. Emotional abuse forces us to believe that we are deserving of harm and when we are forced to normalize that reality it can often perpetuate harm. That harm disproportionately affects those targeted by state

and social violence. Without active recognition of harm happening and self/community accountability repair work, cycles of abuse have often been made normal.

### Moving Through Harms

Participants sharing their experiences of harm through state ramifications highlighted some of the realities that LGBTQ2SIA\* face in emotionally abusive relationships driven by the state. The presence of state on a capillary level demands work from various manifestations within our communities, and within ourselves, to unlearning oppressive modes of being. We are not immune to socialization. All of us are born into worlds, worlds that demand expectations of being. It is imperative to deconstruct how systems of violence are lived within ourselves. As LGBTQ2SIA\* folk experience oppressions from outside communities, the internal and horizontal need to exert power over partners or friends is a way that has been used to cope and continue cycles of harm within LGBTQ2SIA\* communities. *Joyful Militancy* brings up the continual deconstruction of representation, specifically how radicalism can fuel gaslighting and social hierarchy, especially in the spaces that we crave liberation most (Montgomery, berman 2017). Resistance in toxic times looks like decentralized power and a disruption of monopoly on our abilities to provide for each other and hold each other accountable.

## CHAPTER TWO: COLLECTIVE(SELF) ACCOUNTABILITY

## Transformative Justice: Histories and Care Works Already/Continuously Cultivated

Through recognition of history within intimate partner violence it is apparent that not only have most resources and services for folx experiencing intimate partner violence not included access for LGBTQ2SIA\* folx but also monopolized off of community's experiences of violence to fuel the prison industrial complex. Montgomery and berman explain this through the empire's infrastructures, "Empires infrastructure induces dependence on forms of production, specialized knowledge, expertise, and tools that detached people from their capacities to learn, grow, build, produce, and take care of each other" (2017: 137). The Empire has capitalized upon our means of survival and made many people individually dependent upon its resources and services. For many folx working within the forced system of criminalization as an effort for "protection"- is not an option. Black, Brown, Indigenous, and LGBTQ2SIA\* folx are targeted at a dramatically higher rate and are subject to increased violence within the prison industrial complex. Just one of many examples affecting LGBTQ2SIA\* folx that is within the system is gender segregation. "By segregating institutions along sex/gender lines, prisons work to make invisible, isolate, and stigmatize those bodies and gender identity expressions that defy imposed gender binaries" (Lamble 2011: 242). Through the collections of INCITE! (2013) work prison abolitionist movements have helped to draw attention to the perpetuation of violence that many nonprofit industrial complexes have been active in and whose motives are to criminalize. By abolishing inherently violent

responses to harm will hopefully develop a more comprehensive connection to how community accountability can work outside state sanctioned surveillance.

For this reason, it is imperative to focus on the ways in which prison abolition must be central to any liberation movements along with the intersectional analysis of identity politics. strawberry explains their own experience of advocacy in the nonprofit industrial complex

I don't feel like community accountability oriented, like models and transformative justice models-it's just not traumatizing and the way that advocacy work through a nonprofit is. Even though it's like, I feel like there's an opportunity for healing even as me being like a facilitator or something, there's an opportunity for healing even not being directly involved or not being like the survivor necessarily in the process. Whereas yeah, I just feel like doing advocacy in the nonprofit sector is just like, really traumatizing...and further traumatizing. (2019)

This is an excellent example in which structural state attempts to “address” violence perpetrated to harm folx actively attempting to heal from trauma. “The task then is to engage in social change using strategies that bring a queer/trans analysis to queer/trans struggles” (Lamble 2011: 254). Building off that conception, I hope to bridge the ways in which community accountability and a necessary recognition of self-transformation is needed for anti-oppression work. “While we often put our attention on the state and demand transformative and restorative justice it is important that individuals begin practicing in our personal, familial, and communal lives-we can reach the people we need to reach and measure our work by the way relationships feel” (adrienne maree brown 2017:133). That being said, the fabric that holds the most vulnerable folx to being able to access support need relationships that are working with decentralized organizing, within movement and also within ourselves. This demands focus on modes of trust and

responsibility through active check-ins and self-reflections, which can be extremely difficult when those modes have been infiltrated with potential systemic harm.

### Accountability and Resilience

Transformative justice and community accountability processes have been key to addressing harm in communities without perpetuating state violence. Accountability has a long history of how and when it has been utilized to shape and transform ourselves and communities. Folx have been working for more accountability practices and shifting to transformative justice as a tool of dismantling prison/military industrial complexes, disposability politics, and settler colonialism. Accountability work is care work that centers compassion in the revolt against systemic violence. Accountability addresses the ways systemic violence is lived and learned through us and carves out more ways to repair without perpetuating harm upon each other. The works of INCITE! Women and Trans People of Color Against Violence, Critical Resistance, CARA (Communities Against Rape and Violence), Mia Mingus, adrienne maree brown, Dean Spade, Ana Clarissa Rojas Durazo, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, Mariame Kaba, Shira Hassan, along with countless other magical organizations and humans, have cultivated so much depth and understanding in how community/self-accountability and transformative justice is lived within and around us while providing tangible practices. These works have shaped countless tools to recognize and respond to violence happening in communities most marginalized by systemic violence's. While recognizing the positioned violence of how settler colonialism has shaped these forms of harm, it has also been etched and lived in the ways that we communicate with one another.

In the midst of recognizing harm is happening we need to also be prepared to hold it and address it. LGBTQ2SIA\* folx have experienced disproportionately high emotional abuse yet there have been few resources for folx to practice accountability in our own communities for a variety of reasons, some of which has been explained through the lens of participants. A further analysis of the survey showed that participants had a shared experience of lacking resources and services that did not perpetuate harm in our communities. In asking questions in the survey that inquired about their own witnessing of or relationship with self and community accountability, the majority of participants had not experienced transformative justice in ways that more fully addressed systemic violence. In the same answer's participants were eager to lean into what critical accountability would look and feel like. While the 26 participants of the survey were asked to talk about their experiences in emotional abuse they were also asked questions about accountability and resilience. adrienne maree brown defines resilience as "The ability to become strong, healthy or successful again after something bad happens. the ability of something to return to its original shape after it has been pulled, stretched, bent, etc. an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change....'Resilience: (v) the way the water knows just how to flow, not force itself around a river rock; and surely I can stretch myself in the shape my own path is asking of me.' -Corina Fadel" (2017: 123). One of the first questions I asked of participants in the survey was how they personally defined resilience. I asked this question because I wanted to get a sense of how folx related to the idea of resilience being a part of accountability for emotional abuse.

The participants had the chance to engage with what the word meant for them in the survey when I asked what they thought LGBTQ2SIA\* resilience is.

Resilience is being able to pick yourself up. Knowing you are worth living another day every single day. It may be hard to think that way but taking it a day at a time helps. There is strength in numbers, and there are so many of us all around the world. We as a community are filled with love and strength no matter what we go through. We are still here. We continue to fight for our rights as people no matter how many are against us. We stand together. (Bozda they/them, 18-24, Hispanic/White, pan-romantic, grey-aseexual, and genderfluid)

Freedom to thrive authentically with the backing of a supportive and affirming community/network. (Ana, she/they, 25-35, mixed poc, queer)

Having the ability to love and live as your truest self-surrounded by community who embrace all identities and (healthy) forms of love without judgment bias or hierarchy being present. It means resisting consistent efforts to eradicate your existence through binary oppressions from entire systems, institutions, and individuals. It's coming together and uplifting each other rather it's directly off the cement or metaphorically<3 (abalone, he/him, 18-24, white, trans masc)

In the answers above participants engaged with resilience in ways that reflected a sense of confidence and strength within us and the community in the face of harm and oppression, embodying the definition and example that adrienne maree brown shared. It is important for folx to envision and discuss what resilience is because it can be a huge part of what accountability can encompass. Although, terminology and representation of language can be layered and complex for folx. One participant talks about the various representations the concept of "resilience" can hold.

Honestly I struggle with the word resilience. Sometimes it sounds too much like Black women are strong stereotype. (Goldie, they/them, 25-35, Black/Igbo, Agender & non-binary, bi, aromantic spectrum, asexual spectrum, polyamorous)



As Goldie has shared it is necessary to understand that languages and terms of definition are going to land differently for folx. Other participants talked about the meaning of resilience being a source of strength, adaptability, compartmentalization, comfortability, uncomfotability, unapologetic, authenticity, power, love, unity, community, intergenerational healing, future generational healing. While engaging with what resilience meant for folx participants were also asked what community accountability and self-accountability meant for them. This question was meant to understand where participants were coming from when they answered further questions. Just like the meaning of resilience, the definition of systems of accountability can vary widely depending on the individual defining these systems. Following the participants' account of resilience folx were asked about accountability. *What does community accountability and self-accountability mean for you?* This question allowed a space that engaged with how people understand what holding someone accountable might mean.

I think it's being able to call someone out for their systematically oppressive behavior and then educating them on it. (Tracy Turnblad they/them, 18-24, Hispanic, Queer)

I'm not sure about community accountability. I would hope that the community would hold racist homophobes accountable for their actions. (Peaches she/her/they, 50+, white, lesbian/gay)

Sticking up for each other, knowing our self-boundaries, and the community respecting our boundaries, having brave spaces (Cai they/them/theirs, 18-24, Mexican/Latinx, pansexual, demi gender/genderfluid)

It is important for those who have been wrong to be aware of themselves. To reach out to those they have hurt and apologize. To do their research and prove to those they care. They want to better themselves. I cannot respect people who do not own up to their mistakes. We are human, and it happens to the best of us. (Bozda they/them, 18-24, Hispanic/White, pan-romantic, grey-asexual, and genderfluid)

Community accountability means addressing issues fairly and directly as they come up in the community...ideally in a consensus-based group. Interpersonal issues are often private but if an abuser or offender wants to be part of the community, the whole community should address the issue and fair, safe, integration of the person back into the community with respect to the victim and the values of the community as a whole, regardless of the offender's "status." (Sassi, she/her/they/them, 25-35, White, Pansexual)

While not everything, it(accountability) certainly counts for a great deal of how we interact with the world at large, and the queer community in particular. Example - lesbians fought for years (and continue to fight) for recognition and parity in the queer and general societies. Yet some turn on the very people who helped them and deny their existence. (Signy, she/her, 50+, multi-racial, lesbian, transsexual, transwoman)

I think it's a little bit sticky when you, as a community, are wanting to hold someone accountable in maybe different ways than the survivor is. And how do you go about like holding an abuser accountable when the survivors not really comfortable with their story being shared. And like, I guess just the differences between like call out and call-in tactics and like those notions of like, you know, community accountability and really dealing with the perpetrator of harm I think is like a big hiccup sometimes. Sometimes you can do all this work and be really ready and like going guns blazing and then the survivors like "I just want to forget it all." And you're like...Wait a second, like at this point, this isn't just affecting you it's affecting the 20 other people who maybe know about this incident and now maybe feel like a little bit stuck and not able to work with the perpetrator. (strelitzia nicolai, he/him/his, 18-24, white, queer)

Community accountability is when the community looks at ways it has facilitated the violence that has occurred and seeks to correct them and also gives support to the perpetrator and the survivor of the violence and their works of self-accountability. (Goldie, they/them, 25-35, Black/Igbo, Agender & non-binary, bi, aromantic spectrum, asexual spectrum, polyamorous)

That the community finds ways of accountability through other forms of justice such as transformative justice instead of the prison industrial complex and the

individual takes accountability for their actions and also makes sure that they never commit harm again. (Fern, she/they, 18-24, Arab, queer/bi-sexual/pansexual)

But like having-because this is related to the accountability stuff-having been doing some of that already. That's not like through anything besides like, me and other people being like, "hey, let's do something about this." "That system doesn't work." "And it's not going to help anything, so let's do something." (perdido, he/they, 25-35, queer)

It means holding folx and yourself accountable to stop harm from being re-perpetuated and hurting others in your community. It means when you perpetuate harm you take time to self-reflect, apologize, repair the relationship (when given the opportunity) and change your behavior. It means transformative restorative justice, survivor centeredness and utilizing a prison abolitionist framework for solutions to healing and restoring (abalone, he/him, 18-24, white, trans masc)

The ways that participants engaged with community accountability involved active recognition that harm is happening and intervention with the intention of stopping cycles of abuse. In many social justice movements, especially those that address just one form of violence, many intersecting abusive powers are overlooked. Such as the critiques brought up in the framing of this thesis with many Black and Indigenous scholars and activists having headed the work in anticolonialism being central to anti-violence movements. The bridge between anticolonialism and community accountability are all connected to the way we hold ourselves accountable in moments that harm shows up in us. With the latter part of the question regarding self-accountability many participants had in depth understandings and explanations of how self-accountability might be experienced.

Self-accountability means addressing your own mistakes, first with yourself and the party you have interacted with. This means listening, reflecting, and taking direct action to learn and change how your problem is solved in the future. It also

means accepting a potential role change in the personal dynamic or the community you are a part of. (Sassi, she/her/they/them, 25-35, White, Pansexual)

Self-accountability for perpetrators is when a person looks at the harm and/or abuse they've caused and works to make amends. In addition, they seek out resources to facilitate their own healing so as to not commit the same harm. For survivor's self-accountability is seeking out resources to facilitate their own healing and learning more about the systemic violence that affected the interpersonal violence they've suffered so as to not embrace other forms of abuse and to address their own biases and prejudices. (Goldie, they/them, 25-35, Black/Igbo, Agender & non-binary, bi, aromantic spectrum, asexual spectrum, polyamorous)

It means that I have to check problematic behaviors and actions with myself and others to help to foster spaces of support (Alexis, their, 18-24, Latinx, Pansexual and gender queer)

Accountability for myself means that I alone am responsible for who I am out in the world and how I choose to respond to others. (Peaches she/her/they, 50+, white, lesbian/gay)

I'm trying to be reflexive and like being responsible about myself and my actions like, that doesn't necessarily mean, unfortunately, that I can like expect that from other people right? Or like be upset when they're not doing that work because we don't live in a culture, even in a queer culture, where that's like really highlighted and heralded as like, we need to be putting more effort and energy into accountability. (Crow, they/them, 25-35, white, queer)

And I think it's also calling yourself out on the systematically oppressive behavior you display, not getting upset but learning from your mistakes apologizing to those you've hurt and moving forward with new knowledge. It's about education. (Tracy Turnblad they/them, 18-24, Hispanic, Queer)

The answers from the participants revealed a theme of disrupting this binary way of thinking about the “perpetrator”/ “survivor” and recognizing harm showing up being learned through a social order that supports violence. We are constantly taught that harm happens outside of us, which it does, *and also* that does not mean we can't also reflect harm. As Crow highlights we don't have control over how other people react and respond

to harm, but we do have control over how we ourselves do. Leaning into the uncomfortable, messy, and difficult work of self-accountability within community accountability is imperative because it can in fact disrupt some cycles of abuse. In Kai Cheng Thom's (2020) essay "What To Do When You've Been Abusive" in *Beyond Survival Strategies and Stories from the Transformative Justice Movement* they list several concrete steps to holding yourself accountable when harm has occurred. One of the sections is to face the fear of accountability, where Thom talks about the fact that taking accountability takes a lot of courage, "We live in a culture that demonizes and oversimplifies abuse, probably because we don't want to accept the reality that abuse is actually commonplace and can be perpetuated by anyone" (2020: 75). If we are not able to recognize and hold ourselves accountable for harm, how are we supposed to shape more compassionate and accountable worlds?

#### Survivor Centered as Collective Care

Complexing the ways that we interact with work and representation demands the accountability transformative justice has been calling for. As I have previously mentioned Risling Baldly discusses a theme to "(re)write, (re)right, and (re)rite" (2018: 142). It can be an encompassing of the histories to which already have been written, have already been a right, and have already been ritualized. Reimagination for cultivating narratives beyond the dominants call for a recognition and respectful use of the stories we are helping to represent within works. Sophie Tamas's work in *Biting the Tongue that Speaks You: (re)writing survivor narratives* describes this concept of writing dirty where trauma is socially framed as something unspeakable, dirty, and uncomfortable, Tamas asks us to

do the work of leaning into the dirty messy work of trauma informed care work. “Such work thrives on its own vagueness, incompleteness, and uncertainty, bending genres, blending the mundane the abstract, making spaces for the disorganized, messy, emotional, and the embodied, without either inserting them neatly into orderly constructs or abdicating the responsibility to think critically” (Tamas 2011: 444-445). In regard to transparent and collective ways in which survivorship is difficult to maneuver Tamas offers ways in which trauma can be understood or navigated in different ways. In the interviews many folx talked about collective understanding of survivorship. They brought up situations in which individual understanding, learned understanding, and collective understanding of what it means to be a survivor and how to address issues in which harm has been perpetuated. Crow explains survivor centeredness needing to encompass recognition that many folx have experienced emotionally abusive trauma. Community accountability processes need to recognize and unlearn toxic ways in which survivorship is decentralized. “And because of the rampant ways that abuse exists in this world and society and these relations, survivor’s centeredness to me, means yeah, recognizing whether or not someone discloses their identity as a survivor or the experiences that they've had or that people have put on to them. Just knowing that they're there.”. Craving ways to navigate worlds that envelope more conscious recognition in privilege and positionality and survivorship as a collective experience, where gentle and messy accountability and empathy meet. strelitzia nicolai discusses the collective ways in which survivorship can be defined: “It's just like an automatic epistemology that everyone understands.” In this way, a community revisiting and understanding ways that

accountability can be practiced craves collective and personal self-reflections on how the empire or state is working within us to perpetuate harm. A part of shaping more compassionate and accountable worlds means discussing and digesting how we have named and shaped systems of response to harm. One of the central themes to accountability is centering the survivor in accountability processes. One of the questions I asked participants was what they thought being survivor centered meant and how can it be experienced. In answering the question many participants addressed that survivor centeredness in accountability also meant addressing the harm done to the extended communities.

Being survivor-centered is centering not only the current survivor but also all other survivors of violence. It is maintaining the agency of the survivor. It is recognizing that more abuse is not the solution to abuse. (Goldie, they/them, 25-35, Black/Igbo, Agender & non-binary, bi, aromantic spectrum, asexual spectrum, polyamorous)

I think to me like survivor centeredness just means like approaching someone with trauma or who's experienced abuse in a way that like, understands how trauma abuse affects people, and is empathetic to it. (strawberry, they/them, 25-35, White, queer)

And so, like instead of just even saying like, we're not going to victim blame here, like survivor's centeredness is like we're creating spaces where survivors can heal and feel supported, which to me, like goes beyond just not blaming the victim, but instead like honoring survivor's agency, especially in these moments and interactions or spaces where their agency has been stripped of them. (Crow, they/them, 25-35, white, queer)

As many of the participants shared, the cycles of abuse are contingent upon no action or recognition taken. As the participants explained, survivor centeredness encompasses the knowledge of trauma informed responses that stop cycles of abuse.

### Powers of Self/Collective Accountability: How They Mingle

In the following answers participants were asked how community and self-accountability help to cultivate resilience in LGBTQ2SIA\* communities. Again, the reality that accountability means stopping cycles of harm was echoed.

Community accountability is a pipe dream because we inflict the same emotional abuse on each other that the world inflicts upon us. Until that changes there will be no community accountability. (Carlos he/him/his, 50+, Latinx, Gay)

Carlos brings up the reality that much of the beginning of this thesis discussed. We need to be simultaneously addressing the systemic state and social normalizations of harm against LGBTQ2SIA\* communities. As explained, abolition and community/self-accountability are intrinsically connected. In order to recognize and respond to abuse we also need to understand where it is coming from and how social violence upon LGBTQ2SIA\* folx has intensified the ways we experience harm:

It is impossible to retell the stories of trans intimate partner violence without noting how interpersonal and systemic forces both facilitate abuse and fuel ongoing patterns over oppression that are reinforced by our very institutions, often the ones that may have been created with the intention of mitigating abuse.” (Guadalupe-Diaz: 2019: 57)

While Guadalupe-Diaz frames emotional abuse through the context of trans and nonbinary folx his analysis becomes a transformative place of necessary critique in how and why emotional abuse is utilized. We live in a world that utilizes politics of disposability to perpetuate harm and violence upon our own community members. Often when folx are harmed either it is not addressed at all or we shut folx out completely, giving no room for accountability or transformation. I asked participants to answer the



question: *Have you witnessed community accountability for emotional abuse? If yes, can you explain what it has consisted of?*

Great question. I haven't seen this (accountability) with my own eyes, but I have seen abuse go unchecked in queer communities; the survivor tends to withdraw from the community and find supports elsewhere. (Lyle, they/them, 18-24, white, lesbian and nonbinary/trans)

If community and self-accountability can function safely and fairly, it will bring these communities together instead of driving them apart. It will leave room for emotional growth and community wisdom, choosing working through issues instead of banishing folx when not necessary. The less divisiveness within this community, the stronger we will be facing larger threats posed on the entire community from entities outside of it. (Sassi, she/her/they/them, 25-35, White, Pansexual)

It (accountability) can cultivate healthier relationships with supportive transformative critical folx who can end abusive cycles. It can allow for praxis to emerge that grows our resilience even stronger, no longer having survivors isolate themselves in fear of their abuser still being present, harming others, triggering others. It can make space for all in the queer community to be given a space for growth. (abalone, he/him, 18-24, white, trans masc)

Lyle's point explains how often in bringing up harm happening in LGBTQ2SIA\* communities leave survivors of harm in positions that further isolate them from support. Many of the other participants, as Sassi and abalone reflect, highlight the necessity to witness accountability and being a part of those processes as imperative to breaking cycles of harm. Addressing harm can be extremely painful. It's not easy to acknowledge that perhaps someone you care about has caused harm, that perhaps you yourself have caused harm-but facing the reality of emotionally abusive communication in and around us can help to unlearn harm and uplift critically compassionate relationships.

Desires to be Without Harm While Leaning Into the Uncomfortability of Conflict

*“Joy does not come about by avoiding pain, but by struggling amid and through it. To make space for collective feelings of rage, grief, or loneliness can be deeply transformative” (Bergman, Montgomery 2017: 62).*

Participants shared an eagerness to grow through accountability, an eagerness to lean into uncomfortability so that we could come to places of compassion and resilience with one another. When asked if the participants had actually witnessed community accountability for emotional abuse, many had not. A handful had responded with yes and maybe. Although many folx had not witnessed community accountability take place, there has been a yearning for addressing harm in ways that break cycles of violence.

I can imagine it consists of accepting when you have hurt somebody else, making promises to adjust and actually following through. Leaving room for the hurt you caused. Sometimes that's a lot of hurt, and that part is hard and uncomfortable.  
(Will, he/him, 25-35, mixed, trans, gay)

Will brings up the concepts of accountability being recognition, reflection, and actions to change. What was powerful also about Will's response is a recognition of also knowing the processes of accountability are painful and uncomfortable. We are imagining ways that address harm in our communities that also acknowledge the uncomfortability of responding. *That is transformative.* The process of addressing harm is messy and rarely comfortable. Even in Kaba and Hassan's (2019) title *Fumbling Towards Repair* they describe the nonlinear and turbulent practice of accountability. We want to be in relation with one another that does not perpetuate violence. The recognition of how each of us is capable of harm, that causing harm is a learned communication that has been sculpted by settler colonialism through the cis-white-hetero-patriarchy, is imperative to leaning into more ways to imagine worlds and communications that center accountability and

compassion. Working towards transformative justice, prison and police abolition, along with community accountability, are all parts of what care work can feel like. In those realms and processes are the critical queer imaginations that help to shape an anarchism that is manifesting compassion and joy in the uncomfortable and messy ways we build community.

### Community Accountability Spells

The ways in which we take into account our own position in community accountability can be exercised in many magical ways. Where it gets sticky is when the Empire leaks through in spaces that may have been a space for transformation. It submerges as a toxic monopoly off of trauma and as fuel for the savior complex. In simple terms the savior complex can be understood as folx or entities “saving” a person or peoples with the intent of patting themselves on the back. The savior complex is rooted in white supremacy. *White Fragility* is part of white saviorism through the inability to talk about racism that is micro-aggressive or systemic (Flaherty 2006: 19). Not talking about racism showing up out of fear in hurting white people's feelings compromises peoples of color's experiences, labor, time, etc. This is also connected to the ways that emotional abuse is not talked about in LGBTQ2SIA\* communities due to a fear of disrupting narratives and choosing to erase and deny the existence of emotional abuse. By discussing micro-aggressions and systemic violence there is fear in outside (Empire) blaming LGBTQ2SIA\* communities for their own abuse tactics instead of recognizing the connection to the empire's patriarchy, gender binary, hetero-centrism, and colonial monogamy.

In attempting to address some of these violence's that are happening within communities a call out culture has developed. Participants such as Strelitzia Nicolai have prefaced what a call out might consist of. A call out culture centers the call out as a central way of holding people accountable. A call out usually consists of publicly addressing or shaming a perpetrator of harm. Though call out culture has its power in some forms of awareness movements and safety practices, it often extracts a sense of saviorism while leaving the cycle of abuse to continue in some way or another. Ideally we want to strive for the immense levels of transformation and healing that comes from continual accountability. In call out culture we can connect ways in which saviorism mentality shows up. Though as the reading *Community Accountability: Emerging Movements to Transform Violence* (2011) points out, community accountability is not a new concept, it is through the modes of colonialism that ways of addressing harm outside of state have been attempted to be barred, when in fact the works beyond criminalization have been in existence. While call outs can be a great way to practice public accountability, more than often that is where it is left. There is no room for healing, or breaking a cycle, and often those who call out, pat themselves on the back and are able to leave the situation. Healing is not in one call out. Healing is not in one moment in time. Healing is continual, active, and nonlinear. Author and activist Ana Clarissa Rojas Durazo reflects on justice work, "Just as prison abolition is more than an anti-prison project, community accountability is more than an anti-violence project. It is a liberation project that creates space for autonomous radical transformation in our lives and communities, seeking to transform the roots of violence" (Durazo 2011-12: 79). In these

words, Durazo expands the notion of community accountability to fill the gaps of one-time interactions and asks us to delve into the roots of violence.

All of the participants in the interviews highlighted this theme of ongoing accountability. That there is a continuum in the accountability processes. Through community accountability, transformative justice, and personal accountability, all of the folx I interviewed spoke about accountability and justice being in some way a continuous process, that healing or breaking cycles of violence works as many interventions and check-ins whether that is through yourself or through others. perdido (2019), talked about how community accountability is not just one moment in time. “It’s not just like an instant”. Expanding, they discuss more on how accountability is a reverberating process, which needs constant revisiting. The various ways in which accountability is lived and relieved-addressed and readdressed. The nonlinear ways that healing shows up for all participants are also revealed through addressing ways in which abuse tactics have been utilized. strawberry (2019) discusses ways in which emotional abuse happens “Just another huge one is gaslighting. Which is just denial, kind of, either overtly or subtly of the other persons, like reality and experience”. They go on to describe how patterns of abuse can often make survivors seem “crazy”. That unlearning and relearning can be difficult in emotional healing and it is not linear. That is why call out culture can and has fed into an extractive and toxic means of accountable process, especially within communities most marginalized, where again, Durazo suggests we need to disrupt and understand the roots of violence.

Those roots have an unavoidable relation to us. Flaherty delves into recognizing systemic power relations: "I think it is the responsibility of those of us who come from privilege and therefore are susceptible to saviorism, to engage in the hard work of building accountability to others and ourselves" (Flaherty 2006: 33). Flaherty, and others, draw attention to the necessity of privileged folx needing to put in the work of unlearning harmful practices. I believe that this is where many folx in LGBTQ2SIA\* communities get caught up. There is a lack of self-accountability, especially amongst white folx who perhaps navigate their positionality as not having privilege because they are a part of an oppressed group without critically analyzing their intersections of privilege. One of the participants, perdido, talks about an instance where they were navigating being in a space with queer white femmes but being the only person of color. perdido (2019) reflects, "So I'm like, I'm like trying to find the balance and being like, I can speak up for like certain things, but then I gotta pull back for this, and I gotta acknowledge these other things because of the position I'm in!" perdido's experience reflects the reality and constant grappling with intersectionality and identity politics. Drawing upon Flaherty and Durazos notions of accountability, adrienne maree brown pulls from the quote "Transform yourself, so you can transform the world." she expands, "This doesn't mean to get lost in the self, but rather to see our own lives and work and relationships as a front line, the first place we can practice justice, liberation, and alignment with each other and the planet" (adrienne maree brown 2017: 53). By framing accountability as something that needs to be a continual, internalized process, not just something outside of ourselves, we might

allow spaces of growth and messiness to occur. In these modes of accountability, the existence of critical queerness holds forms of delicious metamorphosis.

## EXPANSIONS: THE BITS OF VISIONS FOR LATER

Through the semi structured interview questions and the survey, I also hoped to start a conversation about how this research could be used or applied. By including a question asking how participants would like to see this research be used or applied it allowed them a potential furthering relationship with their own words, and the impact their words would have. Some of the visions and needs from the research participants shared are the following:

- Financial support to folx already doing the work
- Free trainings on emotional abuse in LGBTQ2SIA\* communities in our communities along with trainings for resource and service providers such as educational and medical
- Public speaking about accountability processes
- Utilize this research to change Title IX with the whole csu system
- Teaching youth about self/community accountability
- Utilize this research to shape more transformative justice practices in humboldt county ca
- humboldt taking up active accountability process to address harm and violence it has perpetuated
- Spreading this research to break stereotypes
- Informing communities to stop bullying of queer students or help folx recover from PTSD



- Use this research to help cultivate conversations on abuses happening in LGBTQ2SIA\* communities (especially rural ones)
- Create resources for campus programs (such as Eric Rofes Center or the Multicultural Center at Humboldt State University)
- One-page infographic or brochure on information found and made public, the research information spread *outside* of the CSU system so all folks (especially LGBTQ2SIA\*) can have access to their own stories
- Use this research to create more survivors centered spaces and interventions that are applicable in multiple spaces
- Use this research to fuel future conversations and research, utilizing this research to not only bring up the problematic ways that current resources and services address harm in LGBTQ2SIA\* communities but push them to actually address that harm structurally
- Center community-based groups so that they are able to apply the research accessibly
- Turn the research into zines
- Plan some sort of retreat or residency for learning and sharing and where you're able to make food and create art based within unlearning harm and building community—a big show at the end—perhaps make it travel so it's accessible to multiple communities
- More grants for LGBTQ2SIA\* folks
- Accessible reading material

- LGBTQ2SIA\* communities in Humboldt addressing their harmful practices
- More LGBTQ2SIA\* community spaces that are actively accountable and deconstructive—especially in Humboldt County
- A handbook or zines that helps folks grapple with what emotional abuse and accountability might look like in their own lives and experiences.

Some of the main themes I gathered was not just carving out more understanding of LGBTQ2SIA\* abuse in institutional realms but also needs in cultivating an awareness and accountability processes that can be utilized by and through LGBTQ2SIA\* communities. There are also urgent desires to centralize youth in harm awareness and accountability processes. Youth is our future, when we imagine worlds that cultivate compassion through accountability, collectively and individually, we need to center working with and through youth imaginations. That said, one of the most present desires folks shared was translating the research to something not only more accessible for folks outside the institution of education but in the expansive realms of art and creation. What does addressing harm feel like through zines, art, and food? In what ways can collective and self-accountability take place through our imaginations' sensories? Full of hope, I am excited to support, expand, and meet some of these needs along with holding excitement for other folks that might move towards meeting these shared desires.

## CONCLUSION ABYSS

Grasping to understand worlds and structures that not only allow violence to happen but encourage it, forces those harmed to process grief constantly. Many LGBTQ2SIA\* folx have not been given tools to dismantle our own internalized harms, as we are constantly under attack from state and social normalizations of violence in our communities. Using concepts of Audre Lorde's *erotic*, adrienne maree brown's *pleasure*, along with Montgomery and bergman's *joyful militancy* the planting of resilience in LGBTQ2SIA\* communities can be felt and used to fill our own and each other's cup as we continuously address and unlearn patterns of abuse culture within and surrounding within us. Indigenous activists and scholars have built the frameworks of understanding abuse and violence as a tool of colonization. Settler colonization has attempted to make invisible its continuous hand in the ways that we treat one another. Through the labor, imaginations, and remembering from Indigenous activists and scholars a more full picture of how emotional abuse through the violence of patriarchy, the gender binary, traditional monogamy, and heterocentrism in LGBTQ2SIA\* communities are directly related to the colonial projects. In order to undo our relationships with the settler colonial projects lived through the state and Empire we also need to transform our relationships with justice, ourselves and our communities. The state has been an integral part of how settler colonialism has operated. Many of the participants had experienced barriers, violence, and isolation when seeking support through the state and other nonprofit structures. Through the models of structural surveillance that the prison industrial complex and

nonprofit industrial complex has created, the state has successfully profited off of the anti-violence movements. As the process of state involvement increases violence on those who are systematically oppressed it also “...depletes our imaginative potential to transform violence” (Durazo 2011-12: 81). When systems of state attempt to criminalize, savior complexes arise within LGBTQ2SIA\* communities that can leave lateral damage and perpetuate privilege and power dynamics that leave individuals capable of exerting control over others. In order to reimagine justice, we need to understand how settler colonialism has been integrated in the ways that justice is understood currently within abuse culture.

Abuse culture in LGBTQ2SIA\* communities is the normalization of harm to, by, and through us. In order to move through harms, we need to disrupt how abuses have been normalized socially, culturally, and internally. The care work of community and self-accountability has been expansive. Within conceptualizations of queerness, emotional abuse tactics have been framed to be nonexistent or normalized. It is important to critically engage with how misogyny, transphobia, homophobia, and exertion of control over intimate partners have been infiltrating our abilities to exercise community accountability by reaffirming power and control tactics over one another. Queering critically weaves accountability, transformation, and healing into a continuum. Seeking out that healing, “Joy rarely feels comfortable or easy, because it transforms and reorients people and relationships” (Montgomery, berman 2017: 29). In the participants sharing expansions and visions of how they would like to witness the growth of this thesis and research we are able to witness LGBTQ2SIA\* folx needs and imaginations for more

accountable and compassionate worlds. Though this work may feel isolating we are never alone. In the moments and processes of finding and cultivating joy there are magic makers that help to manifest its messy, fierce tenderness. Alok Vmenon, is a gender non-conforming author, activist, artist, and poet who has constantly written and been a part of queer and trans visibly movements along with orbiting within collective accountability. Where bodies and existence hold magic in vulnerability and strength, Alok writes *our natural state is water*:

*hello my name is alok and i believe that feelings are real and that gender is not. i believe that loneliness is an international state of emergency. i believe that crying in public is political. i believe everyone in the world is mourning the disconnect between who they are and who they pretend to be. i believe that performing is the closest i have ever come to being honest. i believe that i am weak and scared and confused and i believe that is ok. i believe that everyone in the world needs someone to have hot chocolate/mango laasi/coffee (your choice) and just talk about it. i don't know what "it" is but I believe it haunts you like it does me. i believe it has the capacity to unravel you at the seams. i believe we want to fall apart because water is our most natural state. i believe in falling apart routinely -- every once in a while. like a forest burns and a heart bends, i believe in breaking down just to see what was waiting there underneath. (Vaid-Menon 2017).*

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## APPENDIX

Semi-Structured Interview Questions and Guide for Support Systems in Existence for  
LGBTQ2SIA\* Identities and Communities Experiencing Emotional Abuse.

1. Tell me a bit about yourself and the organizations or spaces you are a part of? How did you get involved?

Inquiry: Community involvement, educational experience, general organization/space involvement

2. Have you observed any community intervention for emotional abuse? If yes, can you explain what it has consisted of?

Inquiry: Emotions, survivor centeredness, outcomes

3. What are ways folx experience emotional abuse? In what ways might LGBTQIA\* folx experience emotional abuse?

Inquiry: Experience, books/articles, resources

4. What kind of resources or services have you seen be provided to folx experiencing emotional abuse in LGBTQIA\* communities?

Inquiry: Access, structure, support groups, strategies

5. Do you feel like there are barriers specific to breaking cycles of emotional abuse? How so? Specific to LGBTQIA\*?

Inquiry: Influence on decisions, funding, training, social norms for abuse

6. What does being survivor centered mean to you?

Inquiry: Personal experience, work experience, response strategies

7. In what ways would you like to see this research be used or applied?

Inquiry: Community projects, intervention strategies, research applied and dispersed, emotions

8. Is there anything we missed, you'd like to talk about, or expand on?

### Survey Questions

#### *Personal Information*

Pseudonym/Alias

Gender Pronouns

Age

Race/ethnicity

How do you identify, at this time, as a part of LGBTQ2SIA\* communities? (Examples: lesbian, polyamorous, trans, genderqueer, intersex, pansexual, asexual etc.)

#### *Emotional Abuse and Systemic Violence*

Have you ever experienced emotional abuse?

Do you know someone who also identifies as LGBTQ2SIA\* that has experienced emotional abuse?

If you have experienced or witnessed emotional abuse, have you felt like you can access support? If yes, where?

How might LGBTQ2SIA\* folx experience emotional abuse differently than folx who do not identify as LGBTQ2SIA\*?

What forms of systemic violence have shaped tactics of emotional abuse in LGBTQ2SIA\* communities? (i.e., the gender binary, patriarchy, traditional monogamy, and heterocentrism)

What are other identities and experiences that influence emotional abuse in LGBTQ2SIA\* communities?

In what ways can emotional abuse impact how folx have relationships with themselves and others?

#### *Accountability and Resilience*

How do you define LGBTQ2SIA\* resilience?

What does community accountability and self-accountability mean for you?

How do you define being survivor centered?

How can community/self-accountability help to cultivate resilience in LGBTQ2SIA\* communities?

Have you witnessed community accountability for emotional abuse? If yes, can you explain what it has consisted of?

#### *Concluding Questions*

In what ways would you like to see this research be used or applied?

Is there anything we missed, you'd like to talk about, or expand on?

Please enter your email if you are interested in participating in a follow up interview.

\*Make sure to review consent form about mandated reporting\*

## GLOSSARY

*Anti-colonialism:* Actively working against colonialism.

*Care work:* Labor that centers care and fierce compassion for one another.

*Critically Queer:* I define critically queering as redefining the ways in which we exist and love through an active engagement with time, place, space, and representation, continuously working towards more just and accountable relationships with ourselves and others. This working definition encompasses various abolitionist, anti-state, queer theorists and activists before me.

*Community Accountability:*

Community accountability (CA) strategies aim at preventing, intervening in, responding to, and healing from violence through strengthening relationships and communities, emphasizing mutual responsibility for addressing the conditions that allow violence to take place, and hold people accountable for violence and harm. This includes a wide range of creative strategies for addressing violence as part of organizing efforts in communities when you can't or don't want to access state systems for safety. (The Audre Lorde Project, National gathering on transformative and community accountability, 9/2010)

*Emergent Strategies:* A spectrum of recognizing the complexities of the world, functions, systems around us, and how they can intricately be shifted and reimaged within our own lives. (adrienne maree brown 2017)

*The Empire:*

...the organized catastrophe in which we live today. It is not really an 'it' but a tangle of habits, tendencies, and apparatuses that sustain exploitation and control. We argue that it entrenches and accumulates sadness: it crushes and coops forces of transformation and detaches people from their own powers and capacities. It keeps us passive, stuck in forms of life in which everything is done to us or for us. This takes place through overt violence and repression, the entrenchment of hierarchical divisions like heteropatriarchy and racism, by inducing dependence on institutions and markets and by effective control and subjection. (Montgomery, berman 2017: 280-281)

*Emotional Abuse:*

While there is no set standard definition for emotional abuse within the context of intimate relationships, it can be understood as the 'use of verbal and nonverbal communication with the intent to harm another person mentally or emotionally, and/ or to exert control over another person.' These abusive actions can span a wide range of behaviors including threats, coercive control, verbal aggression, and exploitation. (Guadalupe-Diaz 2019, 69)

*Joyful Militancy:* A Process of continual questioning in the ways we interact with worlds, a disruption of the binary between optimistic and pessimistic, along with uses affinities to strengthen emergent relationships (Bergman, Montgomery 2017).

*LGBTQ2SIA* \*: Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, Queer, Two-Spirited, Intersex, Asexual, \*Any other identities that may be



*Magic:* Magic, defined, in some ways, the unexplainable happenings around us that can evoke feelings of wonder.

*Resilience:* adrienne maree brown defines resilience as “The ability to become strong, healthy or successful again after something bad happens. the ability of something to return to its original shape after it has been pulled, stretched, bent, etc. an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change....’Resilience: (v) the way the water knows just how to flow, not force itself around a river rock; and surely I can stretch myself in the shape my own path is asking of me.’-Corina Fadel” (2017, 123).

*Self-Accountability:* The process of taking accountability for your own actions or harm.

*Structural Settler Colonialism:* How settler colonists’ ideologies have built the current governmental and institutional structures that were made for continuing the war upon Indigenous peoples.

*Spells:* The intentional actions to cultivate and build magic.

*Transformative Justice:* Transformative Justice (TJ) is a political framework and approach for responding to violence, harm and abuse-Mia Mingus 2019